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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

VOL. 7 NO. 27 FEBRUARY 1946

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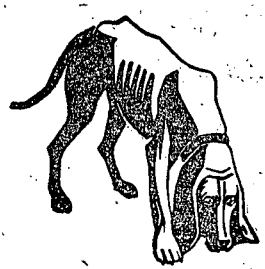

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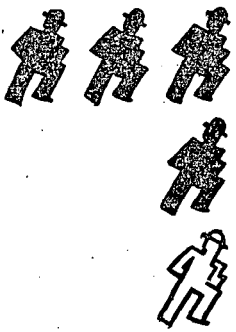

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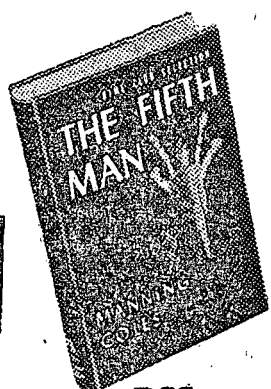

BY MANNING COLES

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IT PAYS TO ADVERTISE

It was S. S. Van Dine who first used the full strategic power of continuity titles. The recurring similarity of his titles (with only the key-word changed from book to book) not only established a personal association between his pen-name and his books but also developed in the reader's mind a psychological acceptance for his future books. All the Van Dine novels were called (with one lamentable exception) THE SO-AND-SO MURDER CASE, *with* SO-AND-SO *always a six-letter name or word like* BENSON, GREENE, KENNEL, *and* BISHOP. *Three years after Van Dine inaugurated his title pattern, Ellery Queen founded a title-dynasty of his own and for nine novels we consistently used the formula of* THE ROMAN HAT MYSTERY. *In our case, the second word was always the name of a country or nationality, in the adjectival form, and the third word the name of a concrete object. Thus, after* THE ROMAN HAT MYSTERY *such titles as* THE DUTCH SHOE MYSTERY *and* THE CHINESE ORANGE MYSTERY *proclaimed a new book by Ellery Queen.*

Van Dine could have pursued his pattern indefinitely — there are an almost infinite variety of six-letter words and names in the English language. But after nine Queen combinations, we found ourselves suffering from acute title-anemia. True, we had not yet resorted to THE PERSIAN RUG MYSTERY *or* THE SWEDISH MATCH MYSTERY; *but facing such bottom-of-the-barrel scrapings and keenly conscious of the finite limitations of geography, we abandoned continuity in favor of such diverse titles as* CALAMITY TOWN *and* THE MURDERER IS A FOX. *It is interesting to note, however, that Van Wyck Mason later devised a variation of the Queen formula, using the name of a city instead of a country — as in* THE SHANGHAI BUND MURDERS *and* THE BUDAPEST PARADE MURDERS.

Other detective-story writers have also aimed, in their choice of titles, at this "shock of recognition." The immortal saga of Father Brown is an example of cumulative consistency: THE INNOCENCE OF, THE WISDOM OF, THE INCREDULITY OF, THE SECRET OF, *and* THE SCANDAL OF FATHER BROWN *prove that the peerless Chesterton was also a student of mnemonics. Georges Simenon's three volumes of short stories have a titular uniformity:* THE THIRTEEN CULPRITS, THE THIRTEEN ENIGMAS, *and* THE THIRTEEN MYSTERIES. *H. C. Bailey's Mr. Fortune series reveals a quasi-continuity, built like the Father Brown titles around the protagonist's name. But the writer who deserves first prize for ingenuity, who vanquished all competitors by the sheer brilliance of his schematic conception, is Anthony Abbot.*

Perhaps you don't realize the extraordinary cunning of Mr. Abbot's title-continuity. To refresh your memory, some of his Thatcher Colt books

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are called ABOUT THE MURDER OF THE CLERGYMAN'S MISTRESS, ABOUT THE MURDER OF THE CIRCUS QUEEN, *and* ABOUT THE MURDER OF A STARTLED LADY. *Even the two Thatcher Colt short stories retain the basic uniiy — "About the Disappearance of Agatha King" and "About the Perfect Crime of Mr. Digberry." This title plan may seem a trifle unwieldy, but its slight clumsiness is deliberately designed, with malice aforethought. You see, Fulton Oursler (the real name of Anthony Abbot) had shrewdly noticed that most book lists, especially those printed for and by libraries, are arranged alphabetically — either by author's name or story title. This arbitrary method of tabulation places Queen, for example, far down on any authors' list, Van Dine even deeper, Edgar Wallace deeper still, and poor Zangwill usually at the very bottom. But where is Anthony Abbot? How many author's names can precede the A-b-b of Abbot — admitting that as yet there is no detective-story writer calling himself Aaron Aardvark. And how many book titles can normally come before the A-b of* ABOUT THE MURDER OF WHOEVER-IT-IS? *By either system of cataloguing, author's name or book title, Mr. Abbot assured himself top-of-the-list!*

All of which brings us to the author at hand — Patrick Quentin, alias Q. Patrick, alias Jonathan Stagge. Patrick Quentin is a firm believer in and devout disciple of old-fashioned title-continuity. Already he has strung together PUZZLE FOR FOOLS, PUZZLE FOR PLAYERS, PUZZLE FOR PUPPETS, *and* PUZZLE FOR WANTONS, *featuring Peter Duluth, detective. Now, in his first Peter Duluth short story (more accurately, his first Peter and Iris Duluth short story) Mr. Quentin continues the continuity.*

"Puzzle for Poppy" is a delightfully wacky yarn. You've read or heard of those screwy wills in which a huge fortune is left (usually by a spinster) to a favorite pet. Well, meet one of the richest canines in the world — an affectionate St. Bernard, no less. Imagine a case in which a beautiful St. Bernard is the heroine who is in danger of her life! As Iris Duluth says: "Really, this shouldn't happen to a dog!"

PUZZLE FOR POPPY

by PATRICK QUENTIN

YES, Miss Crump," snapped Iris into the phone. "No, Miss Crump. Oh, nuts, Miss Crump."

My wife flung down the receiver.

"Well?" I asked.

"She won't let us use the patio. It's that dog, that great fat St. Bernard. It mustn't be disturbed."

"Why?"

"It has to be alone with its beautiful

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thoughts. It's going to become a mother. Peter, it's revolting. There must be something in the lease."

"There isn't," I said.

When I'd rented our half of this La Jolla hacienda for my shore leave, the lease specified that all rights to the enclosed patio belonged to our eccentric co-tenant. It oughtn't to have mattered, but it did because Iris had recently skyrocketed to fame as a movie star and it was impossible for us to appear on the streets without being mobbed. For the last couple of days we had been virtually beleaguered in our apartment. We were crazy about being beleaguered together, but even Héloise and Abelard needed a little fresh air once in a while.

That's why the patio was so important.

Iris was staring through the locked French windows at the forbidden delights of the patio. Suddenly she turned.

"Peter, I'll die if I don't get things into my lungs — ozone and things. We'll just have to go to the beach."

"And be torn limb from limb by your public again?"

"I'm sorry, darling. I'm terribly sorry." Iris unzippered herself from her housecoat and scrambled into slacks and a shirt-waist. She tossed me my naval hat. "Come, Lieutenant — to the slaughter."

When we emerged on the street, we collided head on with a man carrying groceries into the house. As we disentangled ourselves from celery stalks, there was a click and a squeal of delight followed by a powerful whistle. I turned to see a small girl who had been lying in wait with a camera. She was an unsightly little girl with sandy pigtails and a brace on her teeth.

"Geeth," she announced. "I can get two buckth for thith thnap from Barney Thtone. He'th thappy about you, Mith Duluth."

Other children, materializing in response to her whistle, were galloping toward us. The grocery man came out of the house. Passers-by stopped, stared and closed in — a woman in scarlet slacks, two sailors, a flurry of bobby-soxers, a policeman.

"This," said Iris grimly, "is the end."

She escaped from her fans and marched back to the two front doors of our hacienda. She rang the buzzer on the door that wasn't ours. She rang persistently. At length there was the clatter of a chain sliding into place and the door opened wide enough to reveal the face of Miss Crump. It was a small, faded face with a most uncordial expression.

"Yes?" asked Miss Crump.

"We're the Duluths," said Iris. "I just called you. I know about your dog, but . . ."

"Not *my* dog," corrected Miss Crump. "Mrs. Wilberframe's dog. The late Mrs. Wilberframe of Glendale who has a nephew and a niece-in-law of whom I know a great deal in Ogden Bluffs, Utah. At least, they *ought* to be in Ogden Bluffs."

This unnecessary information was

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flung at us like a challenge. Then Miss Crump's face flushed into sudden, dimpled pleasure.

"Duluth! Iris Duluth. You're *the* Iris Duluth of the movies?"

"Yes," said Iris.

"Oh, why didn't you tell me over the phone? My favorite actress! How exciting! Poor thing — mobbed by your fans. Of course you may use the patio. I will give you the key to open your French windows. Any time."

Miraculously the chain was off the door. It opened halfway and then stopped. Miss Crump was staring at me with a return of suspicion.

"You *are* Miss Duluth's husband?"

"Mrs. Duluth's husband," I corrected her. "Lieutenant Duluth."

She still peered. "I mean, you have proof?"

I was beyond being surprised by Miss Crump. I fumbled from my wallet a dog-eared snapshot of Iris and me in full wedding regalia outside the church. Miss Crump studied it carefully and then returned it.

"You must please excuse me. What a sweet bride! It's just that I can't be too careful — for Poppy."

"Poppy?" queried Iris. "The St. Bernard?"

Miss Crump nodded. "It is Poppy's house, you see. Poppy pays the rent."

"The dog," said Iris faintly, "pays the rent?"

"Yes, my dear. Poppy is very well-to-do. She is hardly more than a puppy, but she is one of the richest dogs, I suppose, in the whole world."

Although we entertained grave doubts as to Miss Crump's sanity, we were soon in swimming suits and stepping through our open French windows into the sunshine of the patio. Miss Crump introduced us to Poppy.

In spite of our former prejudices, Poppy disarmed us immediately. She was just a big, bouncing, natural girl unspoiled by wealth. She greeted us with great thumps of her tail. She leaped up at Iris, dabbing at her cheek with a long, pink tongue. Later, when we had settled on striped mattresses under orange trees, she curled into a big clumsy ball at my side and laid her vast muzzle on my stomach.

"Look, she likes you." Miss Crump was glowing. "Oh, I knew she would!"

Iris, luxuriating in the sunshine, asked the polite question. "Tell us about Poppy. How did she make her money?"

"Oh, she did not make it. She inherited it." Miss Crump sat down on a white iron chair. "Mrs. Wilberframe was a very wealthy woman. She was devoted to Poppy."

"And left her all her money?" I asked.

"Not quite all. There was a little nest egg for me. I was her companion, you see, for many years. But I am to look after Poppy. That is why I received the nest egg. Poppy pays me a generous salary too." She fingered nondescript beads at her throat. "Mrs. Wilberframe was anxious for Poppy to have only the best and I am sure I try to do the right thing. Poppy has the master bedroom, of course. I take the little one in front. And then;

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if Poppy has steak for dinner, I have hamburger." She stared intensely. "I would not have an easy moment if I felt that Poppy did not get the best."

Poppy, her head on my stomach, coughed. She banged her tail against the flagstones apologetically.

Iris reached across me to pat her. "Has she been rich for long?"

"Oh, no, Mrs. Wilberframe passed on only a few weeks ago." Miss Crump paused. "And it has been a great responsibility for me." She paused again and then blurted: "You're my friends, aren't you? Oh, I am sure you are. Please, please, won't you help me? I am all alone and I am so frightened."

"Frightened?" I looked up and, sure enough, her little bird face was peaked with fear.

"For Poppy." Miss Crump leaned forward. "Oh, Lieutenant, it is like a nightmare. Because I know. I just know they are trying to murder her!"

"They?" Iris sat up straight.

"Mrs. Wilberframe's nephew and his wife. From Ogden Bluffs, Utah."

"You mentioned them when you opened the door."

"I mention them to everyone who comes to the house. You see, I do not know what they look like and I do not want them to think I am not on my guard."

I watched her. She might have looked like a silly spinster with a bee in her bonnet. She didn't. She looked nice and quite sane, only scared.

"Oh, they are not good people. Not at all. There is nothing they would not stoop to. Back in Glendale, I found pieces of meat in the front yard. Poisoned meat, I know. And on a lonely road, they shot at Poppy. Oh, the police laughed at me. A car backfiring, they said. But I know differently. I know they won't stop till Poppy is dead." She threw her little hands up to her face. "I ran away from them in Glendale. That is why I came to La Jolla. But they have caught up with us. I know. Oh, dear, poor Poppy who is so sweet without a nasty thought in her head."

Poppy, hearing her name mentioned, smiled and panted.

"But this nephew and his wife from Ogden Bluffs, why should they want to murder her?" My wife's eyes were gleaming with a detective enthusiasm I knew of old. "Are they after her money?"

"Of course," said Miss Crump passionately. "It's the will. The nephew is Mrs. Wilberframe's only living relative, but she deliberately cut him off and I am sure I do not blame her. All the money goes to Poppy and — er — Poppy's little ones."

"Isn't the nephew contesting a screwy will like that?" I asked.

"Not yet. To contest a will takes a great deal of money — lawyers fees and things. It would be much, much cheaper for him to kill Poppy. You see, one thing is not covered by the will. If Poppy were to die before she became a mother, the nephew would inherit the whole estate. Oh, I have done everything in my power. The moment the — er — suitable season arrived, I found a husband for Poppy.

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In a few weeks now, the — the little ones are expected. But these next few weeks . . ."

Miss Crump dabbed at her eyes with a small handkerchief. "Oh, the Glendale police were most unsympathetic. They even mentioned the fact that the sentence for shooting or killing a dog in this state is shockingly light — a small fine at most. I called the police here and asked for protection. They said they'd send a man around some time but they were hardly civil. So you see, there is no protection from the law and no redress. There is no one to help me."

"You've got us," said Iris in a burst of sympathy.

"Oh . . . oh . . ." The handkerchief fluttered from Miss Crump's face. "I knew you were my friends. You dear, dear things. Oh, Poppy, they are going to help us."

Poppy, busy licking my stomach, did not reply. Somewhat appalled by Iris' hasty promise but ready to stand by her, I said:

"Sure, we'll help, Miss Crump. First, what's the nephew's name?"

"Henry. Henry Blodgett. But he won't use that name. Oh, no, he will be too clever for that."

"And you don't know what he looks like?"

"Mrs. Wilberframe destroyed his photograph many years ago when he bit her as a small boy. With yellow curls, I understand. That is when the trouble between them started."

"At least you know what age he is?"

"He should be about thirty."

"And the wife?" asked Iris.

"I know nothing about her," said Miss Crump coldly, "except that she is supposed to be a red-headed person, a former actress."

"And what makes you so sure one or both of them have come to La Jolla?"

Miss Crump folded her arms in her lap. "Last night. A telephone call."

"A telephone call?"

"A voice asking if I was Miss Crump, and then — silence." Miss Crump leaned toward me. "Oh, now they know I am here. They know I never let Poppy out. They know every morning I search the patio for meat, traps. They must realize that the only possible way to reach her is to enter the house."

"Break in?"

Miss Crump shook her tight curls. "It is possible. But I believe they will rely on guile rather than violence. It is against that we must be on our guard. You are the only people who have come to the door since that telephone call. Now anyone else that comes to your apartment or mine, whatever their excuse . . ." She lowered her voice. "Anyone may be Henry Blodgett or his wife and we will have to outwit them."

A fly settled on one of Poppy's valuable ears. She did not seem to notice it. Miss Crump watched us earnestly and then gave a self-scolding cluck.

"Dear me, here I have been burdening you with Poppy's problems and you must be hungry. How about a little salad for luncheon? I always feel

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guilty about eating in the middle of the day when Poppy has her one meal at night. But with guests — yes, and allies — I am sure Mrs. Wilberframe would not have grudged the expense."

With a smile that was half-shy, half-conspiratorial, she fluttered away.

I looked at Iris. "Well," I said, "is she a nut or do we believe her?"

"I rather think," said my wife, "that we believe her."

"Why?"

"Just because." Iris' face wore the entranced expression which had won her so many fans in her last picture. "Oh, Peter, don't you see what fun it will be? A beautiful St. Bernard in peril. A wicked villain with golden curls who bit his aunt."

"He won't have golden curls any more," I said. "He's a big boy now."

Iris, her body warm from the sun, leaned over me and put both arms around Poppy's massive neck.

"Poor Poppy," she said. "Really, this shouldn't happen to a dog!"

The first thing happened some hours after Miss Crump's little salad luncheon while Iris and I were still sunning ourselves. Miss Crump, who had been preparing Poppy's dinner and her own in her apartment, came running to announce:

"There is a man at the door! He claims he is from the electric light company to read the meter. Oh, dear, if he is legitimate and we do not let him in, there will be trouble with the electric light company and if . . ." She wrung her hands. "Oh, what shall we do?"

I reached for a bathrobe. "You and Iris stay here. And for Mrs. Wilberframe's sake, hang on to Poppy."

I found the man outside the locked front door. He was about thirty with thinning hair and wore an army discharge button. He showed me his credentials. They seemed in perfect order. There was nothing for it but to let him in. I took him into the kitchen where Poppy's luscious steak and Miss Crump's modest hamburger were lying where Miss Crump had left them on the table. I hovered over the man while he located the meter. I never let him out of my sight until he had departed. In answer to Miss Crump's anxious questioning, I could only say that if the man had been Henry Blodgett he knew how much electricity she'd used in the past month — but that was all.

The next caller showed up a few minutes later. Leaving Iris, indignant at being out of things, to stand by Poppy, Miss Crump and I handled the visitor. This time it was a slim, brash girl with bright auburn hair and a navy-blue slack suit. She was, she said, the sister of the woman who owned the hacienda. She wanted a photograph for the newspapers — a photograph of her Uncle William who had just been promoted to Rear Admiral in the Pacific. The photograph was in a trunk in the attic.

Miss Crump, reacting to the unlikeliness of the request, refused entry. The red-head wasn't the type that wilted. When she started talking darkly

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of eviction, I overrode Miss Crump and offered to conduct her to the attic. The girl gave me one quick, experienced look and flounced into the hall.

The attic was reached by the back stairs through the kitchen. I conducted the red-head directly to her claimed destination. There were trunks. She searched through them. At length she produced a photograph of a limp young man in a raccoon coat.

"My Uncle William," she snapped, "as a youth."

"Pretty," I said.

I took her back to the front door. On the threshold she gave me another of her bold, appraising stares.

"You know something?" she said. "I was hoping you'd make a pass at me in the attic."

"Why?" I asked.

"So's I could tear your ears off."

She left. If she had been Mrs. Blodgett, she knew how to take care of herself, she knew how many trunks there were in the attic — and that was all.

Iris and I had dressed and were drinking Daiquiris under a green and white striped umbrella when Miss Crump appeared followed by a young policeman. She was very pleased about the policeman. He had come, she said, in answer to her complaint. She showed him Poppy; she babbled out her story of the Blodgetts. He obviously thought she was a harmless lunatic, but she didn't seem to realize it. After she had let him out, she settled beamingly down with us.

"I suppose," said Iris, "you asked him for his credentials?"

"I . . ." Miss Crump's face clouded. "My dear, you don't think that perhaps he wasn't a real police . . . ?"

"To me," said Iris, "everyone's a Blodgett until proved to the contrary."

"Oh, dear," said Miss Crump.

Nothing else happened. By evening Iris and I were back in our part of the house. Poppy had hated to see us go. We had hated to leave her. A mutual crush had developed between us.

But now we were alone again, the sinister Blodgetts did not seem very substantial. Iris made a creditable *Boeuf Stroganov* from yesterday's leftovers and changed into a lime green négligée which would have inflamed the whole Pacific Fleet. I was busy being a sailor on leave with his girl when the phone rang. I reached over Iris for the receiver, said "Hello," and then sat rigid listening.

It was Miss Crump's voice. But something was horribly wrong with it. It came across hoarse and gasping.

"Come," it said. "Oh, come. The French windows. Oh, please . . ."

The voice faded. I heard the clatter of a dropped receiver.

"It must be Poppy," I said to Iris. "Quick."

We ran out into the dark patio. Across it, I could see the light French windows to Miss Crump's apartment. They were half open, and as I looked Poppy squirmed through to the patio. She bounded toward us, whining.

"Poppy's all right," said Iris. "Quick!"

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We ran to Miss Crump's windows. Poppy barged past us into the living room. We followed. All the lights were on. Poppy had galloped around a high-backed davenport. We went to it and looked over it.

Poppy was crouching on the carpet, her huge muzzle dropped on her paws. She was howling and staring straight at Miss Crump.

Poppy's paid companion was on the floor too. She lay motionless on her back, her legs twisted under her, her small, grey face distorted, her lips stretched in a dreadful smile.

I knelt down by Poppy. I picked up Miss Crump's thin wrist and felt for the pulse. Poppy was still howling. Iris stood, straight and white.

"Peter, tell me. Is she dead?"

"Not quite. But only just not quite. Poison. It looks like strychnine. . . ."

We called a doctor. We called the police. The doctor came, muttered a shocked diagnosis of strychnine poisoning and rushed Miss Crump to the hospital. I asked if she had a chance. He didn't answer. I knew what that meant. Soon the police came and there was so much to say and do and think that I hadn't time to brood about poor Miss Crump.

We told Inspector Green the Blodgett story. It was obvious to us that somehow Miss Crump had been poisoned by them in mistake for Poppy. Since no one had entered the house that day except the three callers, one of them, we said, must have been a Blodgett. All the Inspector had to do, we said, was to locate those three people and find out which was a Blodgett.

Inspector Green watched us poker-faced and made no comment. After he'd left, we took the companionless Poppy back to our part of the house. She climbed on the bed and stretched out between us, her tail thumping, her head flopped on the pillows. We didn't have the heart to evict her. It was not one of our better nights.

Early next morning, a policeman took us to Miss Crump's apartment. Inspector Green was waiting in the living room. I didn't like his stare.

"We've analyzed the hamburger she was eating last night," he said. "There was enough strychnine in it to kill an elephant."

"Hamburger!" exclaimed Iris. "Then that proves she was poisoned by the Blodgetts!"

"Why?" asked Inspector Green.

"They didn't know how conscientious Miss Crump was. They didn't know she always bought steak for Poppy and hamburger for herself. They saw the steak and the hamburger and they naturally assumed the hamburger was for Poppy, so they poisoned that."

"That's right," I cut in. "The steak and the hamburger were lying right on the kitchen table when all three of those people came in yesterday."

"I see," said the Inspector.

He nodded to a policeman who left the room and returned with three people — the balding young man from the electric light company, the red-headed vixen, and the young policeman. None of them looked happy.

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"You're willing to swear," the Inspector asked us, "that these were the only three people who entered this house yesterday."

"Yes," said Iris.

"And you think one of them is either Blodgett or his wife?"

"They've got to be."

Inspector Green smiled faintly. "Mr. Burns here has been with the electric light company for five years except for a year when he was in the army. The electric light company is willing to vouch for that. Miss Curtis has been identified as the sister of the lady who owns this house and the niece of Rear Admiral Moss. She has no connection with any Blodgetts and has never been in Utah." He paused. "As for Officer Patterson, he has been a member of the police force here for eight years. I personally sent him around yesterday to follow up Miss Crump's complaint."

The Inspector produced an envelope from his pocket and tossed it to me. "I've had these photographs of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Blodgett flown from the files of the Ogden Bluffs *Tribune*."

I pulled the photographs out of the envelope. We stared at them. Neither Mr. or Mrs. Blodgett looked at all the sort of person you would like to know. But neither of them bore the slightest resemblance to any of the three suspects in front of us.

"It might also interest you," said the Inspector quietly, "that I've checked with the Ogden Bluffs police. Mr. Blodgett has been sick in bed for over a week and his wife has been nursing him. There is a doctor's certificate to that effect."

Inspector Green gazed down at his hands. They were competent hands. "It looks to me that the whole Blodgett story was built up in Miss Crump's mind — or yours." His grey eyes stared right through us. "If we have to eliminate the Blodgetts and these three people from suspicion, that leaves only two others who had the slightest chance of poisoning the hamburger."

Iris blinked. "Us?"

"You," said Inspector Green almost sadly.

They didn't arrest us, of course. We had no conceivable motive. But Inspector Green questioned us minutely and when he left there was a policeman lounging outside our door.

We spent a harried afternoon racking our brains and getting nowhere. Iris was the one who had the inspiration. Suddenly, just after she had fed Poppy the remains of the *Stroganov*, she exclaimed:

"Good heavens above, of course!"

"Of course, what?"

She spun to me, her eyes shining. "Barney Thtone," she lisped. "Why didn't we realize? Come on!"

She ran out of the house into the street. She grabbed the lounging policeman by the arm.

"You live here," she said. "Who's Barney Stone?"

"Barney Stone?" The policeman stared. "He's the son of the druggist

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on the corner."

Iris raced me to the drugstore. She was attracting quite a crowd. The policeman followed, too.

In the drugstore, a thin young man with spectacles stood behind the prescription counter.

"Mr. Stone?" asked Iris.

His mouth dropped open. "Gee, Miss Duluth. I never dreamed . . . Gee, Miss Duluth, what can I do for you? Cigarettes? An alarm clock?"

"A little girl," said Iris. "A little girl with sandy pigtails and a brace on her teeth. What's her name? Where does she live?"

Barney Stone said promptly: "You mean Daisy Kornfeld. Kind of homely. Just down the block. 712. Miss Duluth, I certainly . . ."

"Thanks," cut in Iris and we were off again with our ever growing escort.

Daisy was sitting in the Kornfeld parlor, glumly thumping the piano. Ushered in by an excited, cooing Mrs. Kornfeld, Iris interrupted Daisy's rendition of *The Jolly Farmer*.

"Daisy, that picture you took of me yesterday to sell to Mr. Stone, is it developed yet?"

"Geeth no, Mith Duluth. I ain't got the developing money yet. Theventy-five thenth. Ma don't give me but a nickel an hour for practithing thith gothdarn piano."

"Here." Iris thrust a ten-dollar bill into her hand. "I'll buy the whole roll. Run get the camera. We'll have it developed right away."

"Geeth." The mercenary Daisy stared with blank incredulity at the ten-dollar bill.

I stared just as blankly myself. I wasn't being bright at all.

I wasn't much brighter an hour later. We were back in our apartment, waiting for Inspector Green. Poppy, all for love, was trying to climb into my lap. Iris, who had charmed Barney Stone into developing Daisy's films, clutched the yellow envelope of snaps in her hand. She had sent our policeman away on a secret mission, but an infuriating passion for the dramatic had kept her from telling or showing me anything. I had to wait for Inspector Green.

Eventually Iris' policeman returned and whispered with her in the hall. Then Inspector Green came. He looked cold and hostile. Poppy didn't like him. She growled. Sometimes Poppy was smart.

Inspector Green said: "You've been running all over town. I told you to stay here."

"I know." Iris' voice was meek. "It's just that I wanted to solve poor Miss Crump's poisoning."

"Solve it?" Inspector Green's query was skeptical.

"Yes. It's awfully simple really. I can't imagine why we didn't think of it from the start."

"You mean you know who poisoned her?"

"Of course." Iris smiled, a maddening smile. "Henry Blodgett."

"But . . ."

"Check with the airlines. I think you'll find that Blodgett flew in from

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Ogden Bluffs a few days ago and flew back today. As for his being sick in bed under his wife's care, I guess that'll make Mrs. Blodgett an accessory before the fact, won't it?"

Inspector Green was pop-eyed.

"Oh, it's my fault really," continued Iris. "I said no one came to the house yesterday except those three people. There was someone else, but he was so ordinary, so run-of-the-mill, that I forgot him completely."

I was beginning to see then. Inspector Green snapped: "And this run-of-the-mill character?"

"The man," said Iris sweetly, "who had the best chance of all to poison the hamburger, *the man who delivered it* — the man from the Supermarket."

"We don't have to guess. We have proof." Iris fumbled in the yellow envelope. "Yesterday morning as we were going out, we bumped into the man delivering Miss Crump's groceries. Just at that moment, a sweet little girl took a snap of us. This snap."

She selected a print and handed it to Inspector Green. I moved to look at it over his shoulder.

"I'm afraid Daisy is an impressionistic photographer," murmured Iris. "That hip on the right is me. The buttocks are my husband. But the figure in the middle — quite a masterly likeness of Henry Blodgett, isn't it? Of course, there's the grocery apron, the unshaven chin . . ."

She was right. Daisy had only winged Iris and me but with the grocery man she had scored a direct hit. And the grocery man was unquestionably Henry Blodgett.

Iris nodded to her policeman. "Sergeant Blair took a copy of the snap around the neighborhood groceries. They recognized Blodgett at the Supermarket. They hired him day before yesterday. He made a few deliveries this morning, including Miss Crump's, and took a powder without his pay."

"Well . . ." stammered Inspector Green. "Well . . ."

"Just how many charges can you get him on?" asked my wife hopefully. "Attempted homicide, conspiracy to defraud, illegal possession of poisonous drugs. . . . The rat, I hope you give him the works when you get him."

"We'll get him all right," said Inspector Green.

Iris leaned over and patted Poppy's head affectionately.

"Don't worry, darling. I'm sure Miss Crump will get well and we'll throw a lovely christening party for your little strangers. . . ."

Iris was right about the Blodgetts. Henry got the works. And his wife was held as an accessory. Iris was right about Miss Crump too. She is still in the hospital but improving steadily and will almost certainly be well enough to attend the christening party.

Meanwhile, at her request, Poppy is staying with us, awaiting maternity with rollicking unconcern.

It's nice having a dog who pays the rent.

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THE DOUBLE-NAME CLUB

We take this editorial excuse to announce the founding and formation of a new and exclusive society — The Double-Name Club. It is a curious organization, this clique of crimeteers: it has no officers, it collects no dues, it holds no meetings; it offers no benefits or emoluments to its members but by the same token it imposes no duties on them. Indeed, it is a purely honorary association, hatched only a few minutes ago in your Editor's brain, and unless its still unsuspecting members happen to be reading this particular page, they have no idea either of the club's existence or their affiliation as charter members!

The qualifications for membership in The Double-Name Club are strict and precise. First, each member must be a writer of detective stories; second, each member must be a contributor to "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine"; third and last, each member must write detective stories under at least two different names — hence the title, The Double-Name Club.

Until this issue of EQMM there were a mere seven members in the still absent-from-mind coterie — six men and one woman. The masculine membership included your Editor by virtue of their alter ego, Barnaby Ross; John Dickson Carr otherwise Carter Dickson; Anthony Boucher alias H. H. Holmes; James Hilton once-upon-a-time Glen Trevor; Francis Iles likewise Anthony Berkeley; and Q. Patrick who is also Patrick Quentin, as well as, on occasion, Jonathan Stagge. The distaff side was represented by the charming and delicate Craig Rice who doubles as the tough and robust Michael Venning.

With this issue of EQMM a new member automatically adds his double-monicker to the roster of the club — another vote for the men. The new 'tec-twin is William Irish, an appellative disguise for our old friend Cornell Woolrich.

We have known for a long time that Cornell Woolrich and William Irish are one and the same but we have never felt free either to unmask Woolrich or expose Irish. (We remember too poignantly the days when we guarded the "duality" of Ellery Queen and Barnaby Ross, even to the extent of making "joint" lecture tours crosscountry with one-half of Queen playing Ellery and the other half impersonating Barnaby, and not even the lecture agent aware he had hired only one author!) Obviously our friend Cornell also possessed a split literary personality — "black" Woolrich and "phantom" Irish — but we kept his double identity a "trade" secret.

But like murder, "misnomers" will out. Last year, for better, for worse,

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Mr. Woolrich let the cat out of the bag. . . . You'll recall that in our September 1943 issue we reprinted that excellent tale, "After-Dinner Story," by Cornell Woolrich. On November 15, 1944, J. B. Lippincott Company published a collection of six shorts called AFTER-DINNER STORY. *The title story of the book was the same story we brought to you in EQMM. But the Lippincott volume was signed not by Cornell Woolrich but by William Irish — so the "trade" secret was now public property.*

You will find "The Earring" a perfect example of Woolrich and Irish at his combined best — powerful in its atmosphere of terror and suspense and with a final whiplash of surprise that will remind you (if you needed reminding) of the subtle craftsmanship that Woolrich builds into every Irish story, and vice versa.

THE EARRING

by WILLIAM IRISH

THE latchkey jammed, and I had to stand there shaking as if I had St. Vitus's dance before I could get it to work right. My wrists shook, my arms shook, my shoulders shook, trying to force it around. And above all else, my heart shook with the terror.

I was shaking so, it even made the empty milk-bottle standing outside the door sing out. I'd accidentally touched it with the tip of my shoe, I guess. The day maid had a note for the milkman curled up in the neck of it, in the shape of a little paper funnel.

I took the key out, drew a deep breath, and tried again. This time the door opened like pie. There hadn't been anything the matter with the key; I'd been holding it upside down, that was all. I sidled in, eased the door silently closed again behind me — and Mrs. James Shaw was home.

The hall clock chimed four times. They say you can only die once, but I died four times, once for each chime-strike. Not that I wasn't supposed to be out. I could have even rung the doorbell, and saved myself all that wrestling with the key. But I couldn't face anyone, not even Jimmy, just then. Even if he'd just said, "Have a good time at the night club with the Perrys?", even if he'd just looked at me, I would have busted down and tried to crawl into his lapel. I needed to be alone, I needed time to pull myself together.

He'd left the light on for me in the hall. He was still up, working away in the library on his income-tax report. He had the door closed, but I could tell by the light shining out under the sill of it. He always waited until the last minute, like most taxpayers do, and then he had to sit up all night to beat the deadline on it. That was why

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he'd had to miss the party, send me out with the Perrys alone.

It was just a coincidence, but I could thank my lucky stars he'd had to finish it tonight.

That was just about the only thing in the whole mess there was to be thankful for. That at least there wouldn't be any trouble between Jimmy and me.

I tiptoed down the hall toward our bedroom, slipped in, closed the door behind me. I gave it the lights and took a couple of deep body-sobs that had been ganged up in me for the past three-quarters of an hour or more.

The glass showed me a golden wreck staggering across the room toward it. All glittery on the outside: gold-sheath dress, diamonds everywhere there was room to hang them, around my neck, around my wrists, swinging from my ears. Not so glittery on the inside: plenty scared.

I sat down in front of the glass, held my head with both hands for a minute.

When I got my second wind, the first thing I did was open my gold evening pouch and take out — what I had in it. The style ran to big evening bags this season, and that was a good thing for me. I'd needed a lot of room tonight. The letters made a bulky packet. And the little gun I'd taken along, just to be on the safe side, that took up room, too. The ten thousand dollars in cash didn't take up any room, because I hadn't brought that back with me, I'd swapped that for the letters.

That gives you the whole story. Well, maybe not quite, so in fairness to myself I'd better run over it just once. His name was Carpenter. The letters had been written to him five years ago, three years before I even knew there was a Jimmy Shaw in the world. I should have been safe enough. But he'd made use of a trick to bring them up to date. It was a clever trick. I granted him that.

Here's what he'd done. At the time I'd originally written them, we'd both been at the same seaside resort hotel, only on different floors. I'd had them delivered to him personally by bellboys and what not, not sent through the mail. In other words he'd received the envelopes sealed and addressed to him in my handwriting, but unstamped and undated by any post-office cancellation.

He must have been a careful letter-opener, the kind that just makes a neat slit down the side instead of tearing them ragged. He'd pasted over the slits with strips of thin wax paper, put a brand new stamp on each one, added his present street and city address beneath the name, and then sent them back through the mail a second time — to himself. One at a time, over a period of weeks, careful to match the mailing date with the original date inside at the top of the note paper. Get the idea?

Each one had come back to him with this year's date postmarked on the outside, to match the five-year-old date on the inside. I hadn't bothered inserting the year, just the day of the week and the month. He'd

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had the devil's own luck with those cancellations, too. Not one of them had blurred or smudged; the "1941" stood out clear as a diamond. Then when he'd gotten them back, he'd peeled off the wax paper.

In other words, he'd turned a lot of gushy but harmless mash notes written to him by a young girl into a batch of deadly dangerous, incriminating letters written to him by a respectable and socially prominent young married woman with a wealthy husband. And he'd done it by simply sticking stamps on them. What an investment! At an expenditure of two cents a head, he'd gotten back one thousand dollars on each one. There had been ten that were usable; the others either had been signed with my full family name or had things in them that dated them as from that summer.

You'd think a corny set-up like that, which they don't even use in the movies any more, wouldn't go over. I should have refused to pay off, gone straight to Jimmy about it. But it's so easy to be brave until you're face to face with something like that. He'd had me over a barrel. His technique had been beautifully simple and direct. He'd first called me three or four days ago. He'd said, "Remember me? Well, I need ten thousand dollars."

I'd hung up.

He'd called right back again before I could even move away from the phone. "You didn't let me finish what I was saying. I have some letters that you wrote to me. I thought maybe that you'd prefer to have them back than to have them lying around loose."

I'd hung up again.

He'd called back late that same night, after midnight. Luckily, I answered, and not Jimmy. "I'm giving you one more chance. One of them's in the mail already, enclosed in an envelope addressed to your husband. He'll get one every morning, until they're all used up. And the price for the rest'll go up a thousand, each time I send one out. I'm sending the first one to your house and tipping you off ahead of time, so you'll still have a chance to sidetrack it before he sees it. After that, they'll go to his club, where you can't get your hands on them. Think it over. Call me tomorrow at eleven, and let me know what you've decided." And he gave me his number.

I sneaked the letter off the mail tray before Jimmy saw it. I read it over. It should have been written on asbestos. "All night I lie awake and dream of you . . . I'd follow you to the ends of the earth. . . ." No one would realize that I had hoped he would marry me.

I saw what he'd done. How could I prove I'd written them in 1936 and not 1941? My handwriting hadn't changed. Note paper doesn't show any particular age, especially the deckled gray kind I'd used then and was still using now, with just a crest instead of a monogram. The tables turned. I could hardly wait for eleven to come. I hung around the phone all morning.

When he answered, all I said, breathlessly, was: "That'll be all right. Just

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tell me where and when."

Tonight had been when, and the flat I'd just come from had been where. And ten thousand dollars out of my own private checking account had been how much.

At least I'd gotten them all back and it was over. Or is blackmail ever over with? Is it a game that you can ever beat?

There was a fireplace in our bedroom, and I burned the letters in there, one by one; contents and envelopes and spiked cancellations. When the last of them was gone in smoke, I felt a lot better. For about three and a half minutes.

I started to strip off the sparkle, and I opened the little embossed leather case I kept it all in. It was divided into compartments for each variety. The bracelets went into one, the rings into another, and so on. I came to the one for the earrings last. I took the right one off first and pitched it in. Then I reached for the left, and just got air and the bare lobe of my ear. No left earring.

For a minute I sat there without moving, and my face got white and my heart got chilly. Then I jumped up, and shook out my dress, and looked all around on the floor. I was just stalling, I knew where I must have dropped it, but I didn't want to let on to myself.

I knew it hadn't been at the club with the Perrys, and I knew it hadn't been in the first taxi, going over to the Other Place. I'd given a sort of shudder just before he opened the door for me, and happened to touch both earrings with my hands. And I knew it hadn't been in the second taxi, from there home, either.

There was only one time I'd moved violently or agitatedly all evening long, and that was over there, when he'd tried to chuck me under the chin after he'd counted over the money, and I'd reared my head back. It must have been right then that it had come off. The catch had been defective anyway.

I had to have it back. Jimmy was taking them down with him tomorrow, to have them repaired. I could tell him I'd lost one of them, but that would uncover my movements. And there was an even more important reason why I had to get it back. If I left it with *him*, the whole thing would start over again as soon as he'd run through the ten thousand I'd just given him. He'd simply use it to bleed me some more. It was an easily recognizable piece of jewelry, made specially for me.

I went over to the door and listened first, to make sure Jimmy was still safely in the library. Not a sound, so it looked as if he was. Then I picked up the extension phone we had in the bedroom and dialed the number of Carpenter's place that he'd given me last night, along with his final ultimatum.

Suppose he denied having found it? Suppose he was far-seeing enough to already figure on it coming in handy as a future pledge? I couldn't add anything to the ten thousand, not until

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next month. My account was down to bedrock. He had to give it back to me!

I kept signaling, and he didn't answer. I knew he must be there. I'd just come from there myself. He might light out the first thing in the morning, but there was no need for him to leave at this ungodly hour of the night. If I was going to sic the police on him, I would have done it before the transaction was concluded, not after. Even if he was asleep, it surely ought to wake him up, the way it was buzzing away at his end.

I hung up, tried it over. No more luck than the first time. It was the right number. I'd used it to notify him of my capitulation. I shook the thing, I squeezed it, I prayed to it. I had to give up finally. I couldn't just sit there listening to it all night. I was good and scared now.

I had to have that earring, even if it meant — going all the way back there in person, at this hour. And there was no place under the sun or the moon I wouldn't have rather returned to than there.

I took the gun with me once more. I didn't think Carpenter could really be cowed by such a midget, but it made me feel a little less defenseless. I unlocked the door and sidled down the hall. If I could only get out without bumping into Jimmy, then when I came back the second time, he could think it was the first time. That I'd stayed late with the Perrys at the club or something.

The light was gone from under the library door! He must have finished and gone out for a walk to clear his head, after battling with those tax-blanks all night. That was all to the good, provided I didn't run into him outside just as I was leaving. The milk-bottle with its paper funnel was still on lonesome duty.

I made it. I was dying to ask the night liftman, when he brought me down, "Did Mr. Shaw go out just a little while ago?" I forced myself not to. It sounded too underhanded.

I gave the cabdriver the address, and slumped back on the seat with a sigh of relief.

When I got out in front of the sinister-looking place I told the driver to wait for me. I looked up the front of it, and I saw just the one lighted window — his. He was up there, and he was still awake. Maybe he'd stepped out for just a minute at the time I'd rung.

I said to the driver, "Have you got a watch on you?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Well, I want you to do something for me. Time me. If I haven't come out in ten minutes, step over and ring the bell. The one that says 'Carpenter' on it." I smiled insincerely. "Just to remind me. I don't want to stay too long, and I have a bad habit of losing track of the time."

"Yes ma'am. Ten minutes."

I went in. The entrance door was supposed to work on a spring lock, but somebody had forgotten to close it, so I passed right through without waiting and started the long climb that I'd

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already made once before. The place was a walk-up!

I knocked mufflédly, when I finally got up to the top. It was the only flat on that floor; an extra story must have been added when the building had been converted to multiple tenancy.

He didn't move, didn't make a sound. I'd expected that. Live dangerously, and a knock on the door can make you freeze. I could visualize him standing at bay somewhere in there, holding his breath.

I knocked again. I inclined my head to the seam, said in a guarded voice: "Let me in. It's me again." I couldn't bring myself to use his name. As far as I was concerned he didn't deserve one, only a number. I had sense enough not to use my own.

He still didn't stir. I wrangled the knob in growing impatience, and the door fell inertly back before me.

I ventured in after it, expecting to find him sighting a gun at me. That was the usual trick they pulled, wasn't it? He wasn't in the main room, he must be in the little darkened bed-alcove. Had lain down in there and forgotten to put the light out in here.

I didn't go in there. There was just a slim chance — a very slim one — that he hadn't found the earring himself yet, that it was still lying around out here unnoticed, and that I might be able to pick it up on my own hook and slip out again without having to accost him. I doubted it very much; it would have been too good to be true. But I started to look just the same.

First I looked all over the sofa where I'd sat riffling through the letters. Then I got down on all fours, gold dress and all, and started to explore the floor, around and under and alongside it. It was a decrepit, top-heavy thing and threw a big shadow behind it from the ceiling light.

My groping hand crept around the corner of it, and nestled into somebody else's, in a macabre gesture of a handclasp. I whipped it back with a bleat of abysmal terror and sprang away, and at the same time I heard a sharp intake of breath.

I stepped around and looked down, and he was lying there. The position of the bulky sofa had hid him from me until now. Did I say just now he deserved a number? He'd gotten one. And it was up.

One arm was flung out along the floor — the one that I'd just touched. He was lying on his back, and his jacket had fallen open. You could see where he'd been shot; it showed on the white of his shirt. It must have gone into his heart; the hole in the fabric and the bloodied encrustation that surrounded it were around that region. The gun he hadn't had time to use had fallen uselessly over to one side.

My first impulse, of course, was to turn and race out. I fought it down. "Find that earring first," I reasoned with myself. "You've got to get it back!" It was more vital to recover it than ever. It wasn't just a case of keeping my presence here from Jimmy's knowledge now, it was a case of keeping it from the police! What was

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blackmail compared to being dragged into a murder case?

I found myself doing something I wouldn't have believed I had the nerve to do: bending down over him and going through all his pockets. He didn't have it on him. He didn't have the ten thousand cash any more either, but I didn't care about that; it wasn't identifiable.

I crouched there, suddenly motionless. My hand had just then accidentally, as might have been expected, fleetingly contacted his in the course of my search. The brief touch was repellent, yes, but that wasn't what made me freeze rigid like that, stare unseeingly along the floor before me. It was this: the touch of his clammy skin was already cool, far cooler than my own. My sketchy knowledge of such matters was sufficient to tell me that meant he'd been dead some little time, at least half an hour or an hour. The point was, he'd certainly been dead by the time I'd come into the room just now.

And belatedly, like a sort of long-delayed and not at all funny mental double take, I was just remembering that I'd heard a sharp intake of breath at the moment I'd jolted back and given my own strangled little cry of discovery just now.

If he was dead, he hadn't made the sound. And you can't cry out, and still draw in your breath, so I hadn't either.

Not a muscle moved. Just my optic nerves. My eyes traveled over the floor to the arched, doorless entrance to the dark sleeping-alcove, and the musty green hanging, bunched together, that hung down on one side of it. It hung perfectly motionless, just as everything else in the place was perfectly motionless — including myself and the dead man on the floor. But it hung just short of the floor — oh, not more than a couple of inches. And I could see the hub of a single shoe standing there, in the gap. Perfectly motionless, deceptively motionless.

It could have been a discarded shoe of Carpenter's, dropped to the floor in there and happening to land upright. Even though it was pointing straight toward me, as if to match an unseen pair of eyes somewhere high over it, looking out through an unsuspected rent in the drape. It could have been, but then it woudn't have moved.

As if the direction of my eyes had power to lend it motion. It shifted stealthily back and was gone.

There was only one coherent thought in the fireworks display of panic going off inside my head: "Don't scream. Don't move. Someone in there has been watching you ever since you came in. He may let you go, if you don't let on you've spotted him. Work yourself over toward the door, and then break out fast."

I straightened up. The earring was forgotten, everything else was forgotten. I just wanted out. My feet took a surreptitious step under the cover of the gold dress. Then another. Then a third. Like in that kid's game, where they're not supposed to catch you moving. I was halfway over

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to it now. But even if the maneuvering of my feet couldn't be detected, the position of my body in the room kept changing. That was enough to give me away.

About one more step now. I was just starting to raise my hand unnoticeably in front of me, to tear at the knob and fling myself out, when I heard a click behind me. The sort of a click that a triphammer makes when it goes back. My eyes went around in spite of myself. The drape was out of the way and a man had taken its place now. He was holding a gun at about belt-buckle level.

Even if I hadn't met him across a gun — and across a man he'd already killed — the mere sight of him would have thrown a jolt into me. His expression was the epitome of viciousness. You didn't have to wonder if he'd shoot, you only had to wonder when he would. His face was a mirror: it showed me my own imminent death about to take place. He hadn't had to step out and show himself, he could have let me get away without seeing who he was. The mere fact that he had stepped out, showed I wasn't going to be let get away alive.

Suddenly he made a move and I thought for a minute the bullet had found me. But he'd only hitched his head at me, ordering me to come closer.

I couldn't; my feet wouldn't have done it even if I'd wanted them to. "No, don't," I moaned sickly.

"You're not getting out of here to pin this on me," he slurred. His lips parted and white showed through. But it wasn't a grin, it was just a baring of teeth. "I want the dough he was coming into tonight, see? I got a line on that, never mind how. Now come on, where is it?"

"I have — " I panted. I couldn't go ahead. I pointed to the still form lying between us on the floor.

Did you ever hear a hungry hyena howl against the moon? That was the inflection of his voice. "Come a-a-a-ahn, what'd you do with it?" Then his jaws snapped shut — still like a hyena's on a hunk of food. "All right, I don't have to ask for it. I can just reach for it!" But he didn't mean with his fingers, he meant with a bullet. "You've seen me up here now. That's your tough luck." And he said again what he had in the beginning: "You're not pinning this on me."

The gun twitched warningly, getting ready to recoil against the flat hollow of his indrawn stomach, and this was my last minute.

Then instead of going *bam!* it went *gra-a-aack!* Like those little flat paddles on sticks that kids swing around to make noise with. And instead of coming from in front of him, it came from behind him, upon the wall of the bed-alcove somewhere. My knees dipped to let me down, and then stiffened and went on holding me up some more.

It startled the two of us alike. But I was able to recover quicker, because I knew instantly what it was, and he didn't. It threw him for a complete loss. It was one of those sounds that

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are so indefinite as to cause, and yet it was so close by, so harshly menacing. It was simply that taxidriver downstairs reminding me my ten minutes were up.

He swung first to one side, then to the other, then all the way around, half-crouched, and the gun went off me completely. I pulled at the doorknob, whisked out, and went down the stairs like a gold streak.

He came out after me just as I reached the first turn. There was a window there and it was open a little both at the top and bottom, in order to ventilate the stairs and halls during the night. He shot down the stairs at me, on a descending line of fire, just as I flashed around the turn and got out of it. It didn't hit me, but it should have hit the window and shattered it or it should have hit the plaster of the wall and ploughed into it. It didn't hit anywhere.

Later, long afterwards, it came back to me that it must have, through some freak of downward slanting, neatly gone out through that slender inches-wide lower opening without hitting anything. I didn't think of that then. I didn't think of anything then except getting down the rest of those stairs and out to the street.

He didn't fire after me a second time. He couldn't aim at me from where he was any more. The underside of the stairs over me protected me now. His only chance of hitting me would have been to run down after me and overtake me on the same section of stairs. He still could have done that if he'd tried. Any man is quicker than any woman, particularly a woman in rumba-clogs. But he was afraid of whoever it was that he imagined to be coming up from below, and he was afraid of rousing the house.

I heard his feet go scuffling up the other way, higher still, toward the roof.

The entryway was empty when I got down to it. The hackman must have gone right back to his machine after dutifully giving me the summons I'd asked for. He'd even missed hearing the shot. I could tell that by the cheerful matter-of-factness of his opening remark when I streaked out and burrowed into the back of his machine. "Well, I sure brought you down fast, didn't I, lady?" he asked.

"T-take me back uptown," I said.

The guardian milk-bottle was still standing there by our door when I got out my latchkey for the second time that night.

I let myself in and crept down the hall toward the bedroom. I opened the door and stopped short with my hand on the light-switch. Jimmy had come back, and was in there ahead of me, asleep already. I could hear the soft purr of his snoring in the darkness. He evidently hadn't been surprised by my continued absence. He must have thought I was still at the night club with the Perrys. His breathing was so rhythmic, so regular, it almost sounded studied.

I crawled into my own bed in the dark and just lay there. I hadn't got

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the earring back. That was almost a minor matter by now. I kept seeing that face before me, viciously contorted, mirroring death to come. As sure as anything he was going to track me down, find me, and kill me. My life was forfeit to a murderer's self-preservation. I was the only one who knew he had been up there. I was the only one who knew who had killed Carpenter. He had to get rid of me; his own safety demanded that.

Somewhere, sometime, when I least expected it, death was going to strike out at me. I was on borrowed time.

He would surely get me, unless — I got him first.

The lieutenant's name was Weill, I think. I wasn't sure. I wasn't sure of anything, only that I was striking first, protecting my own life in the only way I knew how.

"I am asking that this interview be treated in strictest confidence."

He looked at me patronizingly; I suppose he thought I was going to accuse someone of poisoning someone else's pet pekinese. "You can rely on us."

"I am here to offer you a proposition. I am in a position to give you information which I think you will find not only timely but exceedingly helpful. In return for this, you must not use my name in any shape, form or manner. It means the destruction of my happiness if you do, and I won't risk it. Who I am, who told you this, must not appear on any of your documents or reports or files."

He was still very condescending. "That's a tall order. Are you sure it's something we'd be interested in?"

"You're a lieutenant of the Homicide Squad? I'm very sure, lieutenant."

He gave me a more alert look. "Very well, I accept your terms."

"*You* do. Yes, but how do I know it won't pass beyond your control? It's a matter that you will have to take others into your confidence about."

"Nothing passes beyond my control in this division, if I don't care to have it do so. If, as you say, others have to be taken into my confidence, I can either pledge them, as you are pledging me, or keep you altogether anonymous, as 'Mrs. X.' or 'an unknown woman.' Does that satisfy you? I give you my word as a police officer."

I wasn't altogether sure of that, I didn't know enough about them. "I also want your word of honor as a man."

He eyed me with increased respect. "That," he admitted, "is a whole lot more dependable. I give you both."

I didn't hold back anything, didn't try to cover myself in any way. I told him about the letters, about Carpenter's contacting me, about my first visit there and the payment of the ten thousand cash. ". . . I also took a gun, to make sure the situation wouldn't pass beyond my control. Here it is here. You can examine it if you want to make sure it wasn't I who did it." I passed it to him.

He weighed it in his hand, smiled a little. "I don't think it'll be necessary

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to do that. The slug of a forty-five was taken out of Carpenter's body. This would be the grandson of a forty-five."

I went into the second part of my story, the really pertinent part. If I hadn't known it was that already, the change in his attitude would have told me. He forgot his rôle of putting a feather-brained society woman at ease, became a police-lieutenant with just an important witness before him. "You'd know this man if you saw him again?" he said sharply.

"All night I saw his face before me."

"You say he held a gun trained on you, before this interruption saved your life. Did you get a good look at it?"

"Quite good." I shuddered.

"Have you a good eye for proportions, for taking in measurements at a glance?"

"Fairly."

He opened a desk-drawer, took out a revolver. "This weapon is empty, so don't be nervous. Of course, you were frightened, so maybe it's not fair, but — This is a forty-five here. I am going to hold it just about as you say he held it. Now. Is it the same size as the one he held?"

"No, his seemed heavier, larger."

"But this is a forty-five. Look at it again. Now what do you say?"

I cocked my head. "No. I may be mistaken, but somehow the one he held seemed to be a larger, heavier gun."

He replaced it, looked around in the drawer, finally took out another. "How about this one, then? This is far bigger than a forty-five. This is as big as they come."

I nodded my head affirmatively without a moment's hesitation. "Yes. That's the same size as the one he held."

He put it back in the drawer. "You're a reliable witness. The first gun was a thirty-eight. The *second* was the forty-five." He got up. "I am going to ask you to try and pick him out for us."

They were all so villainous looking. And yet none of them could approach him in viciousness. Maybe that was because I'd seen him in the flesh, in full dimension, and not just flat on paper, in black and white. There were two photos of each one, in profile and fullface. I ignored the profiles, concentrated on the fullfaces. That was the way he'd been turned toward me during those few awful moments up there.

Suddenly I got up from the chair. I put my forefinger on the photograph, but not for his benefit yet, simply for my own, to hang onto it. I closed my eyes and held them that way for a moment. Then when I had his face good and clear, burning clear, I opened them. I let them travel down the line of my arm, all the way down to the end of my finger, and the face on the police photograph blended into the one glowing in my mind, without any changes of outline.

Then I turned to Weill. "This is the face of the man I saw up there," I said.

He said again what he'd said before, up in his office. "You're a good, de-

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pendable witness. I liked the way you did that just then." He bent forward above my shoulder and read from the data accompanying the photos. "That's 'Sonny-Boy' Nelson. He's already wanted for murder, three times over. We've wanted him for a long time."

Back in his office, he finally noticed the change that had come over me since that last remark of his. "What is it, Mrs. Shaw? You seem troubled."

I gestured shakily. "Well, after all, lieutenant, why did I come here? To assure my own safety, to protect my life. This man saw me up there, just as I saw him. He knows I'm the only one who knows he was there. He's going to try to kill me. He's surely going to try, so that I won't be able to tell that to anyone.

"Now if he's already been wanted for three murders, and you haven't gotten him so far, my identification makes no difference; you'll simply want him for four murders now, but that doesn't mean you'll get him any quicker than before. And meanwhile, what's to become of me? I'll be living in danger from one minute to the next."

"I'll detail someone to — "

I quickly warded that off with a gesture.

"No, you can't. How could such a thing escape Jim — my husband's notice? He's bound to ask questions, wonder what it's all about. The whole thing would be bound to come out in the end. And that's the very thing I tried to avoid by coming here to you unasked, entirely of my own accord."

He stared at me incredulously. "You mean, given a choice between risking your life in a very real sense, and having your husband learn of your *innocent* involvement in this whole affair, you'd rather take chances on your life?"

"Much rather," I told him very decisively.

I had been afraid *not* to pay the ten thousand. Now, because I had paid it, I was afraid to have it come out I had. I was afraid he would think there must have been something to cover up after all, if I had been so anxious and willing to pay it.

"You're an unusual person," Weill let me know.

"No, I'm not. Happiness is a soap-bubble. Once it's been pricked, just try and get it back together again! This Sonny-Boy Nelson's bullets can miss me. But my bubble can never be repaired again, once it's burst. Even if it means just a stray thought passing through my husband's mind five years from now — 'Where there's smoke there's fire' — I won't take that chance, I won't risk it. Nothing else in life matters to me." I got up and went toward the door.

Then I saw that he had more to say, so I stopped and looked back.

"Well, if you're willing to take the risk that you are, spread out thin, over days and weeks, how about taking an even greater risk, but all at one time? Getting it over with then and there?"

I answered that by coming away from the door, returning to his desk, and reseating myself acquiescently.

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"You said, a little while ago, that your coming here had done no good; that we'd only want him for one additional murder now but still without knowing where to find him. But you're mistaken. If you're willing to cooperate, run the risk that I just spoke of, we *will* know where to find him. Which is more than we ever knew before."

I saw what he meant. I shook a little, but I lit a cigarette. The cigarette of cooperation.

"Tell me," he said, "are there any out-of-the-way places you're in the habit of going to by yourself, entirely unaccompanied by your husband or friends or anyone else? I mean, without departing from your normal routine or habits of life?"

I thought for a moment. "Yes," I said, "there are."

Jimmy didn't mind my doing private charity work, going around to a few handpicked cases I happened to know of and doing what I could for them, but he didn't like the parts of town it took me into at times. Above all, he didn't like the idea of my going alone into some of those places. He'd warned me again and again to take someone with me.

I made the rounds only about once a month, anyway. I wasn't a professional welfare worker. I never had more than half a dozen at a time on my list, and they were all people that for one reason or another fell outside the scope of the regular relief agencies. Borderline cases that would have been left in the lurch if it weren't for me.

Like this old Mrs. Scalento, living alone and too proud to apply to the city for help. She wouldn't have been eligible anyway; she could make enough to support herself when she was well. But right now she was laid up with arthritis or something, and needed tiding over. That was where I came in.

I got out of the cab outside the tunnel-like black entrance of the rookery she lived in. They never had any lights on the stairs there, but I'd brought a little pocket-flash along in my bag for just that purpose. This was the very sort of place Jimmy had specifically warned me not to venture into alone, particularly at night, but I'd got newer instructions since — from somebody else.

I groped my way down the long Stygian bore that led back to where I knew the stairs to be — from my memory of past visits alone. When I'd found the bottom one with my foot, and the dim light coming in from the street behind me would have failed to penetrate any deeper, I stopped for a moment. I reached into my bag for the pocket-flash, to light me the rest of the way up.

Did you ever have a feeling of someone being near you, without seeing anything, without hearing anything move? Animals have that faculty of detection, I know, but that's through their sense of scent. Scent wasn't involved in this. Just some sort of a pulsing that told of another presence, reached me. To one side of the bat-

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tered staircase, or perhaps around behind it.

I got the flash out and it shot a little white pill of light up the stairs in front of me before I'd even realized I'd nudged the little control-lever on. It must have been obvious which direction I was going to turn it in next, by the way it shook and slopped around in my hand.

The voice was so quiet. So reassuringly quiet. It seemed to come from right beside me, my very elbow almost. "Don't turn the light this way, Mrs. Shaw."

Mrs. Shaw. So then I knew what it was.

"Weill's man. Don't be frightened, Mrs. Shaw. We're covering every one of these places you've showed up at tonight. Just act as you would at any other time."

I went on up the stairs, after I'd gotten my breath back and my heartbeat had slowed a little, thinking resentfully: "The fool! The Other One himself couldn't have frightened me any worse!"

That was what *I* thought.

I knocked when I got up to her door, and then let myself in without further ado. I had to; the old lady didn't have the use of her legs.

She was sitting there propped up in bed, the way I usually found her. She didn't seem glad to see me. Her face always lit up as though I were a visiting angel when I came in, and she'd start to bless me in Italian. Tonight she just stared at me with an intentness that almost seemed to have hostility in it. She didn't utter a word of greeting, held my gaze steadily.

She had just this one large barren room, and then a black hole of a kitchen without any window at all, leading off from it. I closed the door after me. "Well, how are we tonight?" I greeted her.

She gave an impatient swerve of her head away from me, almost as though she resented my coming in on her, as though I were unwelcome. I pretended not to notice the unmistakable surliness — not to mention ingratitude — of the reception I was getting.

The air of the room was stagnant, murky; none of these people were great believers in ventilation. "Don't you think it would be a good idea to let a little fresh air in here?" I suggested. I crossed to the window and raised it slightly from the bottom. She glared at me.

"How's your plant getting along?" I asked her, crouching slightly to peer out at it. I'd sent her over a potted geranium, to cheer her up. She kept it out there on the window-ledge.

A look of almost ferocious vindictiveness passed over her face, as I straightened up and turned away. "You no got to worry about it; iss all ri'," she let me know in husky defiance. It was the first remark she'd uttered since I came in. She was kneading her fingers palsiedly. Or maybe she was trying to convey something with them, I don't know.

I drew out my usual bedside chair and sat down by her. She wouldn't turn to look at me, kept staring

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stubbornly straight ahead, as though I were not there at all.

I tried to win her over. "Have you been using that electric heater? Does it take any of the stiffness out, make you feel any better?"

She said gruffly, "Lotsa bett'."

She had folded her arms across her chest now in a sort of stubborn sulkiness, and she kept jabbing one hand surreptitiously out from underneath the opposite arm. Not toward me, more — toward the door.

I said finally, in a low confidential voice: "What're you trying to tell me?"

Her face flashed around toward me. She bared her almost toothless mouth in a grin that held frightened supplication in it. "I no tella you noth'. What you hear me say? Do I tella you anything?"

"I'll do my own telling," the new voice said.

Someone had come out of the kitchen and was standing right behind my chair. Its back had been turned that way.

I rocketed to my feet, chest going up and down like a bellows. A hand slipped around from behind me and riveted itself to my wrist, steely and implacable. The chair slashed over, discarded.

"Remember me?" was all he said.

The old lady, as if released from a spell, began to jabber now that it was too late: "*Signora!* This man he come here early tonight, he say he know you make visit every time on firsta month, he'ssa going to wait for you. I not can make him go 'way, I no can get up from bed and call policeman. He say if I tella you he'ss in there he shoot me. All time he have gun point at me, I no can't spik — "

He chopped the gun-butt around horizontally at her forehead, without letting go of me, and she flopped back stunned on the pillow. I never saw anything more brutal in my life.

He gave it a little dextrous flip, then, that brought his grip back to the heft. "Now let's take up where we left off the other night, you and me."

I saw he was going to let me have the bullet then and there. He swung me around toward him by my arm, and brought the gun up, to contact-point against my side. He wasn't taking any chances this time.

He'd maneuvered me out away from the bed — I suppose so there'd be room enough for me to fall. But that had unnoticeably changed our respective positions now. He was between me and the door. His back was to it, and I was toward it. But I couldn't see it, or anything else, just then. I never even heard it open. I only heard the terminal thud it made at the other end of its arc, when it brought up flat against the wall. And I heard the harsh order that topped the thud.

"Drop that gun, Nelson, you're covered three ways!"

There was an awful moment of suspended motion, when nothing seemed to happen. Then the gun loosened, skidded down my side and hit the floor.

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A man's head and shoulders showed up, one at each side of him, and there was a third one overlapping a little behind him. His two sleeves tightened up, as if drawn from behind, and so did the neck of his coat-collar. The front buttons pulled tight, to nearly up under his chin.

He'd even forgotten to let go of my wrist, he was still holding it until after they clicked the handcuff on his own.

They said to me, "You must have seen him the minute you got in, to tip us off so quickly — "

"No, I didn't. I didn't see him until just a minute ago, right before you broke in."

"Then how did you manage to — ?"

"I knew he was here the minute I stepped through the door. I could tell by the frozen expression of her face and eyes she was under some kind of restraint or compulsion. And the air was close with stale cigarette-smoke. He'd smoked one or two too many, back there, while he was waiting for me to show up. I knew she never used them herself. But it was too late to back out through the door again, once I'd shown myself; he would have shot me down from where he was. So I stepped over to the window under the excuse of getting some air into the room, and gave that potted plant she kept on it a soundless little nudge off into space."

The man in charge said, "Hold him up here for a couple of minutes, give Mrs. X. a chance to make her getaway from the neighborhood first, before anyone spots her. You see that she gets home safely, Dillon."

"Will she be all right?" I asked.

"She'll be all right, we'll look after her."

"Poor Mrs. Scalento," I said, going down the stairs with the man delegated to accompany me, "I'll have to buy her another plant."

The formal identification was brief, and, as far as I was concerned, of about the same degree of comfort as the extraction of a live tooth without anesthesia. Why they had to have it I don't know, since, according to my bargain with Weill, my own identity was to remain unrevealed. It took place in Weill's office, with a heavy guard at the door, to keep pryers — even inter-departmental pryers — at a distance.

"Bring him in."

I didn't raise my eyes from the floor until the scuff of unwilling shoe-leather dragged against its will had stopped short.

"Mrs. X. Is this the man you saw in the living-quarters of one John Carpenter, —— East —— th, at about four-thirty A.M. on the fifteenth day of April?"

My voice rang out like a bell. "That is the same man."

"Did he have a weapon in his hand?"

"He had a weapon in his hand."

"Stand up, please, and repeat that under oath."

I stood up. They thrust a Bible toward me and I placed my right hand on it as if we had been in a courtroom.

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I repeated after the man swearing me in: " . . . the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." Then I said: "I solemnly swear that I saw this man, with a weapon in his hand, in the living-quarters of John Carpenter, —— East —— th Street, at about four-thirty A.M., April 15th."

Nelson's fatigue-cracked voice shattered the brief silence. "You can't pin this on me! I didn't do it, d'ya hear, I didn't do it!"

"No, and you didn't kill Little Patsy O'Connor either, did you? Or Schindel? Or Duke Biddermen, in a car right outside his own front door? Take him out!"

"She's framing me! She done it herself, and then she made a deal with you, to switch it to me!"

They dragged him out, still mouthing imprecations. The closing of the door toned them down, but you could still hear them dying away along the corridor outside.

Weill turned back to me and let his fingertips touch my gloved hand reassuringly for a moment, maybe because he saw that it was vibrating slightly, as an after-effect of the scene of violence that had just taken place. "That's all. That finishes your participation in the affair. You just go home and forget about it."

I could carry out the first part of the injunction all right; I had my doubts about the second.

"But you had a stenographic transcription made of my identification of him just now, I noticed," I faltered uneasily.

"Yes, and I'm also having depositions made out to be signed by those two witnesses I had in the room, regarding what took place here. In other words I'm preparing affidavits of *your* affidavit, so that it doesn't have to hang suspended in midair. But that needn't alarm you. I have the okay of the D. A.'s office on getting around it in this way in your case."

"But in the courtroom, won't he,— won't his lawyer, demand that you produce me, for cross-examination?"

"Let him. The D. A.'s office is taking that into account, in preparing its procedure. I'm prepared to take the stand in your place, as your proxy, if necessary. And police-lieutenant or not, I don't think I'd make the kind of a witness whose testimony is to be lightly disregarded."

He seemed to have taken care of every contingency; I felt a whole lot better.

He shook my hand. "I keep my bargains. You're out of it to stay. All knowledge of you ends with us."

He said to the detective standing outside the door, "Take this lady to the special departmental car you'll find waiting for her outside. Go along in it with her and keep everyone at a distance. Take her to the -th Street side-entrance of the Kay Department Store."

That was the biggest one in the city. I went in, walked through it on the bias without stopping to buy anything, got into a taxi a moment later at the main entrance, and had myself driven home.

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The whole town had been talking about it for several weeks past, so I wasn't surprised when it finally penetrated even to Jimmy's insulated consciousness. I was only surprised that it hadn't long before then. But the news of the world, for Jimmy, was only the quotations on a tickertape.

Carpenter's metier of preying on respectable and socially-prominent women, which had been uncovered during the course of it, and which the defense was as willing (but for different reasons) to play up as the prosecution, was what gave it the fillip of being above just another underworld killing, I suppose. Anyway, half of the men around town kept whispering that it was the next guy's wife, and the other half looked kind of thoughtful, as though they were doing some mental checking-up.

He'd been reading about it one night — that was toward the end, after it had been going on for several weeks — and he started discussing it with me.

I twiddled my thimble-sized coffee-cup around disinterestedly, looked down at it. "Do you think there really is such a woman?" I asked idly. "Or are he and his lawyer just making it up, howling for her to try to distract attention from his own guilt?"

He grimaced undecidedly, didn't answer right away. But Jimmy is not likely to be without opinions for long; that's why he is as successful as he is. It came on slowly; I could almost see it forming before my very eyes. First he just chewed his lip in cogitation. Then he nodded abstractedly. Then he gave it words. "Yes. I dunno why, but — I have a feeling they're telling the truth, as mealy-mouthed as they are. I wouldn't be surprised if there *was* some woman up there that same night. The prosecution doesn't deny it, I notice; they just clam up each time. That's what makes me half-inclined to believe — "

They hadn't made use of any of the back-stops Weill had prepared, up to this point, so there was still room for legitimate doubt: the affidavits on *my* affidavit; nor had Weill taken the stand to pinch-hit for me. Maybe they were saving them for a bang-up finish, or maybe they weren't going to ring them in at all, had found they didn't really need them. My chief contribution had been to point out Sonny-Boy Nelson to them, and help them trap him, and that could be safely left out of it without damaging their case any. Otherwise what could I add? Only circumstantial strengthening to what was already an overwhelmingly strong circumstantial case. They'd even found someone who had seen him — Nelson — run out of the house next door, gun still unsheathed, and the door of Carpenter's apartment and the two roof-doors had been found yawning wide open.

But there was one thing I couldn't get straight in my own mind. I mentioned it aloud to him — although very carefully. "But why do *they* — Nelson and his lawyer — keep harping on this woman? What do *they* expect to get out of that? I should

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think it would be the other way around, that it would harm them rather than help them to have her —"

He shrugged. "Evidently they've figured out some way in which they think she can help them. They must have something up their sleeves. I wouldn't know. I can't figure out what goes on in the crooked minds of shady lawyers and their clients." He pitched the paper disgustedly aside, as though the subject didn't interest him any more. He delivered himself of a concluding postscript.

"Anyway, if there is such a woman — and most likely there is — she's a fool. She should have gone to her own husband, whoever she is, and taken him into her confidence, before she got in that deep."

How easy to say, I thought poignantly. "Maybe she was afraid to," I mentioned. "Afraid he wouldn't believe her or would misunderstand —"

He gave me a scornful look, as he got up, as though he thought I were a fool myself, to make a remark like that. "The right kind of a husband," he said, sauntering out to the next room, "understands everything, forgives everything. He takes care of things for her. And above all, he doesn't speak of it."

Ah yes, I thought, in theory, on paper, how well that works out. But in real life, just try it and see what cain it would raise!

He only spoke of it once again, after that. "I see he got the Chair."

"Who?" I asked. I'd known since nine that morning, when the first paper came into the house.

"That fellow, what's his name, Baby-Face — No, Sonny-Boy, Nelson."

"He did?" I said, in polite echo.

He pretended to snap the light-switch of my room, to hurry me up.

It put me in mind, somehow, of a switch being thrown in a death-chamber.

The maid came in and said, "There's a man at the door to see you, madam."

Something about it frightened me even before I knew of anything to be frightened about. I started up from the chair. "Who is he? What does he want?"

I saw her staring at me curiously, as if wondering what made me so jittery about such a trivial announcement. I tried to cover it up with a pass of my hand.

"Send him in here."

I knew him by sight, right away. I couldn't help wondering, though, how I'd known it was going to be something like this ahead of time. I went over and closed the door. He had sense enough to wait until I had.

"I'm from Weill's office — "

I didn't let him get any further. "He shouldn't have sent you over here like this! I thought he said I was through! What does he want now?"

"Sonny-Boy Nelson is being taken up to the Death House on the three o'clock train. He's pleading for a last chance to talk to you before he goes — "

"Then even *he* knows who I am! Is

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that how Weill keeps his bargains?"

"No, he doesn't know your name or anything like that. He just knows that you saw him up there, and it was through you we captured him."

"Can I reach Weill at his office? Get him for me."

"Yes ma'am. The only reason he sent me over instead of calling you himself is he thought somebody else might intercept or overhear the call — here he is, now."

"Weill? What about this?" I said crisply.

"No, don't go near him, Mrs. X. There's nothing to be gained by it. You're not under any obligation to him."

"Well, then why did you send someone over here to let me know about it?"

"Simply to give you your choice in the matter, to let you know he's been asking for you. But you're free to do as you please about it. If you want my opinion, there's no need for you to see him any further. He's been tried and sentenced. There's nothing you can do for him."

"But he evidently thinks there is, or he wouldn't be asking for me. And if I refuse, I suppose he'll go up there cursing me — "

"Well, let him. They all curse someone, and never the right one — themselves. Put him out of your mind. No use being sensitive about these matters."

But he was used to dealing in them; I wasn't.

"Would there be any risk?"

"Of identification? No, none whatever. I'll see to that personally. But as I said before, if you want my honest opinion, I don't see any necessity — "

I went anyway. Maybe because I'm a woman. Curiosity, you know. I mean, I wanted to hear what he wanted. I had to, for my own satisfaction and peace of mind. Remember, I wasn't thirsting for his blood. My purpose in going to the police in the first place hadn't been to secure his death. It had been to secure my own life. That had been accomplished from the moment he had been apprehended; he didn't have to be executed to advance my safety any further than it was already.

I didn't think there was anything I could do for him. Weill didn't. But he did. Why shouldn't I at least hear what he thought it was?

I wore such a heavy veil I could hardly see through it myself. Not for Nelson's own sake, he'd already seen my face as plainly as anyone could that night up at Carpenter's, but in order to avoid all risk going and coming from the place. Weill's man went with me as far as the prison building; Weill took over there himself and escorted me into the cell. They didn't keep me outside at the mesh-barrier through which prisoners usually communicate with friends and relatives. They took me right into the cell itself, so my presence would be less likely to attract attention.

He reared up hopefully. He looked — shadowed already, by what was to come. I guess they do. I'd never seen

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one before.

He said, "How do I know if she's the right one?"

I raised the veil and left it up.

"Yeah," he said, nodding grimly. "Yeah." He turned to Weill. "Why can't Scalenza be here? He can put it better than I can."

Weill reached to take me by the arm. "No, no lawyers or anybody else. Say what you want and be quick about it, or she leaves with me right now."

He looked at me, this time. "I want to see you alone."

"He thinks I've got you intimidated," Weill said to me caustically. He looked at me for the answer.

"All right," I said quietly.

"I'll be right outside here," he promised, "so don't be worried." He stepped out.

It's hard, I suppose, to make a plea, when your whole life has to go into it. "Look," he began awkwardly, "I dunno who you are, but you can save me. You're the only one."

"*I* can? Why do you call on me? I never said you killed Carpenter. I only said I'd seen you up there."

"I know, I know. But listen to me, only listen to me, will you? Carpenter was killed with a slug from a .45, remember they brought that out at my trail?" He called it that, "trail," the poor God-forsaken devil.

"I wasn't at your trial."

He rushed on without stopping to listen. "I got a .45, yes. They caught me with one on me. But they never proved that the slug they dug out of him was fired from my gun!"

"The papers said they couldn't, from what I recall. That it had gone through, or at least into, a thin cigarette-case in Carpenter's pocket. That it wasn't the bullet that had pierced his heart, actually, but a fragment of the case, driven into it *by* the bullet. That the bullet itself had been flattened out, the markings had been destroyed by the case, so that they couldn't check it by — whatever they call that scientific method of theirs, ballistics or something. Again, why do you call on me? *I* didn't say you fired at him — "

"No, but you *didn't* say I fired at you. And that's what can save me, that's my only chance!"

"I don't under — "

He didn't actually reach out and shake me, but he made the motions with his hands. "Don't you see? Don't you see? I didn't have a chance to use my gun at all when they caught up with me; they got me without firing a shot. It was still packed the way it was that night up at Carpenter's when they took it from me. Only one bullet out of it, five still in it. That proves I only fired one shot that night. That shot at you on the stairs. I only thought of that now, after it was too late. If you'll only *tell* them that I fired after you out on the stairs, with only one bullet gone that'll prove it couldn't have been my shot that went into Carpenter! If you'll only *tell* them!"

"Whether she does or doesn't, that's not worth a tinker's dam!" Weill's

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voice suddenly grated in at us from outside the cell-opening. He must have been standing there a little to one side taking in the whole conversation. He came in again, motioned curtly to me. "Go home, Mrs. X. Go home and forget the whole business! He could have reloaded that gun sixty times over between the time Carpenter was killed and the time we got him!"

"But the people in the building only heard the one shot!" Nelson shrilled. "They said so, all of them —"

"Because only one was fired on the outside, where they could hear it; the other one was fired inside Carpenter's flat, where they couldn't. That's no good to you at all!" He took me by the arm, politely but authoritatively. "Come on, Mrs. X. Don't waste any more of your time in here. What a nerve this bird has! He tried to kill *you* with that very shot he's speaking of; now he's trying to turn that very shot around and use it to his advantage with your help!"

Back in his office he said to me, "So he got under your skin with that, didn't he? I can tell that by looking at you. That's what he wanted to do."

"But he did fire at me on the stairs," I murmured.

"Then why didn't we come across the bullet imbedded somewhere along them?"

"It may have gone out through the slit of an open window. I passed one, I remem — "

He fanned a hand at me, as if the whole suggestion were ridiculous. "Did you ever deny that he fired at you?"

"No."

"Were you ever even given a chance to *say* whether or not he had?"

"No."

"Then go home and forget about it. I wouldn't let you destroy your home for that rat if I could. His dirty hide's been quadruply forfeited to the State. The whole thing's splitting hairs, in a way, isn't it? They can't execute him, up there where he's going, more than once for one murder. We already had him down on the books for three others.

"If he'd happened to be acquitted of this particular one he was tried for just now, d'you suppose that would have meant he would have been let go? Not on your life! He would have simply been tried over again for one of the others, and sentenced to death anyway."

The execution-notice was tiny, and tucked away so far back within the paper you would have missed it a dozen times over unless you happened to be specifically looking for it.

Well, he was gone now. What was the good of wondering *could* I have saved him? Weill had said he wouldn't have let me even if I could. And he hadn't been thinking entirely of my own personal welfare, either. The police want their victories, too. They work hard for them; they're only human. Justice is not an exact science, it's only relative. It's more than just a matter of subtracting the total number of bullets found left in a gun, and then calling that innocence if there's

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one over. It's: Was there murder in the heart of the man who held that gun? Had he murdered before? Did he try to murder once more, even when his bullet missed me and went out through an open window?

And I couldn't have saved him, I saw that now. My evidence wouldn't have been enough to get him off. On the contrary, it might have had quite the reverse effect: even added strength to the case against him. For if he had been willing to shoot me down to keep it from being known that he had been there, didn't that argue that he had far more than just trespassing to cover up? That he had a just-previous murder to cover up, in fact?

I would only have blackened my whole future, and he still would have been electrocuted tonight.

I moved my arm, resting on the dresser-top, and his death went where his life had gone: into the waste-basket.

I went ahead dressing for the evening.

No, no earrings. I didn't have to be told that there was only one earring left. My heart knew that by heart. I picked it up, and there was something the matter with my eyes. There was still another one lying in the box!

It brought on an attack of vertigo, or something very close to it. I had to stiff-arm myself against the edge of the dresser and just hang on, until it had passed.

Jimmy was dressed, waiting for me outside in the other room. I came out to him, box and all; very white. Like a statue.

"Who put this left earring back? I thought I'd lost it."

He looked at it puzzedly himself for a moment. Then I saw his face clear. "Oh, I remember now. Why, I put it back myself. You were out at the time."

I swallowed. "I haven't opened the case since that night I was out with the Perrys."

I could see him trying to think back. "Well, that must have been the time. Whatever night it was, I remember I'd stayed up all night doing my income-tax. Then I went out to stretch my legs, get a little fresh air, and just as I got back I ran into the milkman, he was standing there by our door, all excited about something. He came running to me.

"'Mr. Shaw, look what I just found inside the empty bottle at your door. There was a note curled up in the neck of it, funnel-shaped, you know, and that caught it and held it.'

"Then when I went to our room with it, I saw that you hadn't come back yet, you were still out. So I put it back in the box and went to sleep. You must have lost it right on your way out, as you left the door."

He stopped and glanced at me. "You've got the funniest look on your face. What're you thinking about?"

"Oh, nothing." I turned and went to get my wrap. "I was just thinking," I added over my shoulder, "how funny life is. Whatever this play is about that we're going to see tonight, it can't match real life for its thrills, its

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ups and downs, its crazy, unbelievable quirks."

I was lying awake later thinking about it; living the whole thing through all over again. I remembered now how I'd had to shake my key, trying to get it in the door, the first time I'd come back. That was what had loosened it, made it drop off. And I remembered now, I'd even heard the funny little plink of glass it had made going in the bottle-mouth. Only at the time I thought it was the tip of my shoe that had grazed it. If I'd only taken the trouble to bend down and look!

All that agony, all that suspense, all that fear, for nothing. I hadn't needed to go back to Carpenter's a second time!

Well, that milkman was an honest man, that was about the only consolation I could derive from the whole thing. Even if Jimmy had given him something at the time he found the earring, he deserved a little extra bonus.

I looked across the room and I saw by the radium clock-dial that the night was nearly gone, and it was about his usual time for covering his route and making a delivery at the door. On an impulse I got up, put something over me, took two ten-dollar bills out of the bureau, and went out to our front door.

I was just in time.

"Bill, here's something for you, for finding that earring of mine, that time." I tried to tuck it into his hand. He wouldn't open it.

"What earring, Mrs. Shaw?"

"You know, the one that had dropped into the empty milk-bottle out here at the door. My diamond earring, with an emerald in the middle."

He was an honest man, all right. "No ma'm, I never found any diamond earring of yours: I never found any diamond earring of *anybody's*. I'd sure remember it if I had."

I managed to utter, "Good night, Bill," and I closed the door rather quickly.

The distance from there to our bedroom wasn't so great. It took me a long time to cover it, though.

I stood looking at Jimmy. His hand was sticking out over the edge of the mattress, the way a person's sometimes does when he is asleep. I reached down and put my own over it and gently clasped it, in a sort of wordless pact, but not strongly enough to disturb him.

Something that he'd once said came back to me. "The right kind of a husband understands everything, forgives everything. He takes care of things for her. *And above all, he doesn't speak of it.*"

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The second labor of Hercules was to destroy a monster with nine heads — the Hydra of Lernea. But Hercules discovered that every time one of the nine heads was cut off, two heads grew in its place. The Herculean task, therefore, was to find the true source, to reach the first head, and by decapitating that original noggin, exterminate the mythological menace.

Now, as you know, Agatha Christie visioned her Hercule Poirot as a sort of modern Hercules. She permitted the man of the little grey cells to accept only twelve more cases before retiring — only those rare, difficult, and unusual cases which would truly test his herculean powers and fittingly comprise his Modern Labors. What, then, is the twentieth-century equivalent of the Hydra of Lernea? What, in this day and age, is so self-renewing that when you annihilate part of it, twice as much rises Phoenix-like in its stead?

Miss Christie found an ingenious and imaginative answer to the riddle. Surely malicious gossip, unfounded and unfriendly rumor, is the modern many-headed monster. As Poirot says, there is nothing so intangible, so difficult to pin down, as the source — the original Hydra-head — of anonymous and scandalous tittle-tattle. Crop off one source of rumor and before you turn around, two more sources have sprung into being. So, St. Detective sets out to slay the Dragon — and mythological murder marches on!

The Labors of Hercules:

The Hydra of Lernea, or

THE CASE OF THE GOSSIPERS

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

HERCULE POIROT looked encouragingly at the man seated opposite him.

Dr. Oldfield was a man of perhaps forty. His fair hair was gray at the temples; his blue eyes worried; his manner hesitant.

"I've come to you, M. Poirot, with rather an odd request. It isn't any good going to the police. They can't do anything. And yet — every day it's getting worse and worse. I — I don't know what to do."

"What is getting worse?"

"The rumors. A little over a year ago, M. Poirot, my wife died. She had been an invalid for some years. Everyone is saying that I killed her — that I poisoned her!"

"Aha! And did you poison her?"

"M. Poirot!"

"Calm yourself," said Hercule Poi-

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rot. "We will take it that you did *not* poison your wife. But your practice, I imagine, is situated in a country district — "

"Yes. Market Loughborough. I have always realized that it was the kind of place where people gossiped a good deal, but I never imagined how much. You have no idea what I have gone through. At first I had no inkling of what was going on. I noticed that people showed a tendency to avoid me, but I put it down to my recent bereavement. Then it became more marked. People pass me on the other side of the street. My practice is falling off. Wherever I go I am conscious of lowered voices, of unfriendly eyes, malicious tongues. I have had one or two letters — vile things. I don't know how to fight this sinister network of lies and suspicion. How can you refute what is never said openly to your face? I am powerless."

Poirot nodded his head. "Yes, rumor is indeed the nine-headed Hydra of Lernea which cannot be exterminated because as fast as one head is cropped off two grow in its place."

"That's just it. There's nothing I can do — *nothing!* And I don't really suppose there is anything you can do either."

"I am not so sure," said Poirot. "Your problem interests me, Dr. Oldfield. I should like to try my hand at destroying the many-headed monster. Tell me a little more about the circumstances which started this malicious gossip. Your wife died, you say, a year ago?"

"Yes. Gastric ulcer."

"Was there an autopsy?"

"No. She had been suffering from gastric trouble over a considerable period."

Poirot nodded. "The symptoms of gastric inflammation and of arsenical poisoning are closely alike — a fact which everybody knows nowadays. . . . Was your wife older or younger than yourself?"

"She was five years older."

"How long had you been married?"

"Fifteen years."

"Did she leave you any property, may I ask?"

"Yes, about thirty thousand pounds."

"Were you and your wife on good terms?"

"Certainly."

"No quarrels? No scenes?"

"Well" — Charles Oldfield hesitated — "my wife was a difficult woman. She was an invalid, very concerned over her health and inclined to be fretful and difficult. There were days when nothing was right."

Poirot nodded. "I know the type. She would complain, possibly, that she was neglected, that her husband was tired of her and would be glad when she was dead."

"You've got it exactly!"

"Did you have a hospital nurse to attend on her? Or a companion?"

"A nurse-companion. A very sensible woman. I really don't think she would talk."

"Sensible, yes — but even the sensible have been given tongues by *le bon Dieu*. I have no doubt that the

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companion talked, that the servants talked, that everyone talked. You have all the materials there for a very enjoyable village scandal. Now I will ask you one thing more. Who is the lady?"

"I don't understand." Oldfield flushed angrily.

Poirot said gently: "I think you do. I am asking you who the lady is with whom your name has been coupled?"

Dr. Oldfield rose. "There is no 'lady in the case,'" he said coldly. "I'm sorry, M. Poirot, to have taken up so much of your time." He went towards the door.

Hercule Poirot said: "I regret it also. Your case interests me. I should have liked to help you. But I cannot do anything unless I am told the whole truth."

"I have told you the truth."

"No . . . "

Dr. Oldfield wheeled. "Why do you insist there is a woman concerned in this?"

"*Mon cher docteur!* Do you not think I know the female mentality? The village gossip — it is based always on the relations of the sexes. If a man poisons his wife in order to travel to the North Pole or to enjoy the peace of a bachelor existence — it would not interest his fellow villagers for a minute! It is because they are convinced that the murder has been committed in order *that the man may marry another woman* that the talk grows and spreads."

"I'm not responsible for what a pack of gossiping busybodies think!"

"Of course not. So you might as well come back, sit down and give me the answer to the question I asked."

Slowly Oldfield resumed his seat. "I suppose it's possible they've been saying things about Miss Moncrieffe. Jean Moncrieffe is my dispenser, a very fine girl."

"How long has she worked for you?"

"For three years."

"Did your wife like her?"

"Er — well, no, not exactly."

"She was jealous?"

"It was absurd!"

Poirot smiled. "The jealousy of wives is proverbial. But I will tell you something. In my experience jealousy, however far-fetched it may seem, is nearly always based on reality. There is a saying that the customer is always right. The same is true of the jealous husband or wife. However little concrete evidence there may be, fundamentally they are always right."

"Nonsense. I've never said anything to Jean that my wife couldn't have overheard."

"Perhaps. Dr. Oldfield, I am going to do my utmost in this case. But I must have from you the most absolute frankness. It is true, is it not, that you had ceased to care for your wife for some time before she died?"

Oldfield was silent for a minute. Then he said: "This business is killing me. I must have hope. Somehow I feel that you will be able to do something for me. I will be frank, M. Poirot. I did not care for my wife. I made her, I think, a good husband, but I was

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never deeply in love with her."

"And this girl, Jean?"

"I — I should have asked her to marry me if it weren't for all this scandal."

Poirot sat back in his chair. "Now at last we have come to the true facts! *Eh bien, Monsieur le docteur*, I will take up your case. But remember this — it is the truth that I shall seek out."

Oldfield said bitterly: "It isn't the truth that's going to hurt me!" He paused. "You know I've contemplated the possibility of an action for slander! If I could pin anyone down to a definite accusation — surely then I should be vindicated. At least, sometimes I think so. . . . At other times I think it would only make things worse — give bigger publicity and have people saying: 'It mayn't have been proved but there's no smoke without fire!'"

He looked at Poirot. "Tell me, honestly, is there *any* way out of this nightmare?"

"That, we shall see," said Poirot.

"We are going into the country, Georges," said Poirot to his valet. "And the purpose of our journey is to destroy a monster with nine heads."

"Really, sir? Something after the style of the Loch Ness Monster?"

"Less tangible than that. I did not refer to a flesh and blood animal, Georges. It would be easier if it were one. There is nothing so intangible, so difficult to pin down, as the source of a rumor."

The morning after Poirot's arrival — he had put up at the local inn — he had his first interview with Jean Moncrieffe. She was tall, with copper hair and steady blue eyes. She had about her a watchful look. She said: "So Dr. Oldfield did go to you. I knew he was thinking about it."

"And you did not approve?"

Her eyes met his. She said coldly: "What can you do?"

Poirot said quietly: "There might be a way of tackling the situation."

"What way? Do you mean to go around to all the whispering old women and say: 'Really, please, you must stop talking like this. It's so bad for poor Dr. Oldfield.' They'd answer you and say: 'Of course, *I* have never believed the story!' That's the worst of the whole thing. They don't say: 'My dear, has it ever occurred to you that perhaps Mrs. Oldfield's death wasn't quite what it seemed?' No, they say: 'My dear, of course, I *don't* believe that story about Dr. Oldfield and his wife. I'm *sure* he wouldn't do such a thing, though it's true that he *did* neglect her just a little perhaps and I don't think, really, it's quite *wise* to have quite so young a girl as a dispenser. Of course I'm not saying for a minute that there was anything *wrong* between them. Oh, no, I'm sure it was *quite* all right. . . .'" She stopped. Her face was flushed.

Poirot said: "You seem to know very well just what is being said. What is your own solution?"

"The best thing for him to do is to sell his practice and start again somewhere else."

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"Don't you think the story might follow him?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "He must risk that."

Poirot was silent for a minute or two. Then he said: "Are you going to marry Dr. Oldfield, Miss Moncrieffe?"

She displayed no surprise at the question. "He hasn't asked me."

"Why not?"

Her blue eyes met his and flickered for a second. "Because I've choked him off."

"Ah, what a blessing to find someone who can be frank."

"I will be as frank as you please. When I realized that people were saying that Charles had got rid of his wife in order to marry me, it seemed to me that if we *did* marry it would just put the lid on things. I hoped that if there appeared to be no question of marriage between us, the silly scandal might die down. But it hasn't."

"Surely that is a little odd?"

Jean said bitterly: "They haven't got much to amuse them down here."

"Do you want to marry Charles Oldfield?"

"Yes, I do. I wanted to almost as soon as I met him."

"Then his wife's death was very convenient for you?"

Jean Moncrieffe said: "Mrs. Oldfield was a singularly unpleasant woman. Frankly, I was delighted when she died."

Poirot said: "I have a suggestion to make. Drastic means are required here. I suggest that somebody — possibly yourself — might write to the Home Office."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"I mean that the best way of disposing of this story once and for all is to get the body exhumed and an autopsy performed."

Jean Moncrieffe said quietly: "I don't agree with you."

"Why not? Surely a verdict of death from natural causes would silence all tongues."

"If you got that verdict, yes."

"Do you know what you are suggesting, Mademoiselle?"

"I know what I'm talking about. You're thinking of arsenic poisoning. But there are other poisons — the vegetable alkaloids. After a year, I doubt if you'd find any traces of them even if they had been used. And I know what these official analyst people are like. They might return a non-committal verdict saying that there was nothing to show what caused death — and then the tongues would wag faster than ever."

"Who in your opinion is the most inveterate talker in the village?"

"I really think old Miss Leatheran is the worst cat of the lot."

"Ah! Could you introduce me to Miss Leatheran — in a casual manner?"

"Nothing would be easier. All the old tabbies are prowling about doing their shopping at this time of the morning. We've only got to walk down the main street."

So they set off. Outside the post office Jean stopped and spoke to a tall middle-aged woman with a long nose and sharp eyes.

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"Good morning, Miss Leatheran."

"Good morning, Jean. Nice day, isn't it?"

"Let me introduce M. Poirot, who is staying down here for a few days."

Nibbling at a scone and balancing a cup of tea on his knee, Poirot became confidential with his hostess. Miss Leatheran had asked him to tea and made it her business to find out exactly what this exotic little foreigner was doing in their midst.

For some minutes he parried her thrusts — thereby whetting her appetite. Then he leant forward: "Ah, Miss Leatheran, you are too clever for me. You have guessed my secret. It is true that I am here at the request of the Home Office. But please keep this information to yourself."

"Of course — the Home Office — you don't mean — *not* poor Mrs. Oldfield?"

Poirot nodded his head. "We-ell!" breathed Miss Leatheran ecstatically.

"It is a delicate matter, you understand. I have been ordered to report whether there is a sufficient case for exhumation."

"You are going to dig the poor thing up. How terrible!" If she had said, "How splendid" the words would have suited her tone of voice better.

"And what is your own opinion, Miss Leatheran?"

"Well, of course, M. Poirot, there has been a lot of talk. But I never listen to talk. There is no doubt that Dr. Oldfield has been very odd in his manner ever since it happened, but as I have said repeatedly, we surely need not put that down to a guilty conscience. It might be just grief. Not, of course, that he and his wife were on really affectionate terms. That I *do* know — on first-hand authority. Nurse Harrison, who was with Mrs. Oldfield for three or four years up to the time of her death, has admitted that much. And I have always felt that Nurse Harrison had her suspicions — not that she ever said anything, but one can *tell* from a person's manner."

"One has so little to go upon," said Poirot.

"Yes, I know, but of course, M. Poirot, if the body is exhumed then you will know."

"Yes," said Poirot, "then we will know."

"There have been cases like it before, of course," said Miss Leatheran, her nose twitching with pleasurable excitement. "Crippen for one. I've always wondered if Ethel Le Neve was in it with him, or not. Of course, Jean Moncrieffe is a very nice girl. I'm sure I wouldn't like to say she led him on exactly — but they were thrown very much together." Poirot looked at her innocently.

"And, of course, with a postmortem and all that, so much would be bound to come out, wouldn't it? Servants always know so much, don't they? And it's quite impossible to keep them from gossiping. The Oldfields' Beatrice was dismissed almost immediately after the funeral, and I've always thought that was odd. It looks as though Dr. Oldfield was afraid she

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might *know* something."

"It certainly seems as though there were grounds for an inquiry."

Miss Leatheran shivered. "One does so shrink from the idea! Our dear, quiet little village — dragged into the newspapers — all the *publicity!*"

"And, as you say, it is probably nothing but gossip!" sighed Poirot.

"Well, I wouldn't like to say *that.* You know I do think it's so true — the saying that there's no smoke without fire."

Poirot rose. "I can trust your discretion, Mademoiselle?"

"Oh, *of course!* I shall not say a *word* to *anybody.*"

On the doorstep Poirot said to the maid who handed him his hat: "I am down here to inquire into the circumstances of Mrs. Oldfield's death, but I shall be obliged if you will keep that strictly to yourself."

Gladys nearly fell backward into the umbrella stand. She breathed excitedly: "Oh, sir, then the doctor did do her in?"

"You've thought so for some time, haven't you?"

"Well, sir, it wasn't me. It was Beatrice. She was up there when Mrs. Oldfield died."

"She thought there had been" — Poirot selected melodramatic words — "foul play?"

Gladys nodded excitedly. "Yes, she did. And she said so did Nurse that was up there — Nurse Harrison. Ever so fond of Mrs. Oldfield she was, and ever so distressed when she died, and Beatrice always said as how Nurse Harrison knew something about it because she turned right round against the doctor afterwards and she wouldn't of done that unless there was something wrong, would she?"

"Where is Nurse Harrison now?"

"She looks after old Miss Bristow — down at the end of the village. You can't miss it — pillars and a porch."

It was a very short time afterwards that Hercule Poirot found himself sitting opposite Nurse Harrison. She was a still handsome woman nearing forty. She had the serene features of a madonna, with sympathetic dark eyes. She listened to him attentively. Then she said slowly: "Yes, I know that unpleasant stories are going about. I have done what I could to stop them, but it's hopeless."

"But there must have been *something* to give rise to these rumors?" Poirot noted that her expression of distress deepened. But she merely shook her head perplexedly.

"Perhaps Dr. Oldfield and his wife did not get on well together and that started the rumor?"

Nurse Harrison shook her head. "Oh no, Dr. Oldfield was always kind and patient with his wife."

"He was really fond of her?"

"No — I would not quite say that. Mrs. Oldfield was very difficult, hard to please and made constant demands for sympathy and attention which were not always justified."

"She exaggerated her condition?"

The nurse nodded. "Yes — her bad health was largely her own imagination."

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"And yet she died. . . ."

"Oh, I know — I know."

He watched her for a minute or two, her troubled perplexity — her uncertainty. He said: "I think — I am sure — that you do know what first gave rise to all these stories."

Nurse Harrison flushed. "Well — I could, perhaps, make a guess. I believe it was the maid, Beatrice, who started the rumors and I think I know what put it into her head.

"You see, it was something I happened to overhear — a scrap of conversation between Dr. Oldfield and Miss Moncrieffe, and I'm pretty certain Beatrice overheard it too, only I don't suppose she'd ever admit it."

Nurse Harrison paused for a minute as though to test the accuracy of her own memory: "It was about three weeks before the last attack that killed Mrs. Oldfield. They were in the dining room. I was going down the hall when I heard Jean Moncrieffe say: 'How much longer will it be? I can't bear to wait much longer.' The doctor answered her: 'Not much longer now, darling. I swear it.'

"And she said again: 'I can't bear this waiting. You do think it will be all right, don't you?' And he said: 'Of course. Nothing can go wrong. This time next year we'll be married.'

"That was the very first inkling I'd had, M. Poirot, that there was anything between the doctor and Miss Moncrieffe. Of course, I knew he admired her and that they were very good friends. I went back up the stairs again — it had given me quite a shock — but I did notice that the kitchen door was open and I've thought since that Beatrice must have been listening. You can see, can't you, that the way they were talking could be taken two ways? It might just mean that the doctor knew his wife was very ill and couldn't live much longer — and I've no doubt that that was the way it was — but to anyone like Beatrice it might mean more than that — it might look as though the doctor and Jean Moncrieffe were — well — planning to do away with Mrs. Oldfield."

"But you don't think so yourself?"

"No — no, of course not."

Poirot looked at her. "Nurse Harrison, is there something more that you know? Something you haven't told me?"

"No! What could there be?"

"I do not know. But I thought that there might be — something."

She shook her head.

Poirot said: "It is possible that the Home Office may order an exhumation of Mrs. Oldfield's body!"

"Oh no! — What a horrible thing!"

"You think it would be a pity?"

"I think it would be *dreadful!* Think how terrible for poor Dr. Oldfield."

"You don't think that it would really be a good thing for him?"

"How do you mean?"

Poirot said: "If he is innocent —" He broke off. He watched the thought take root in Nurse Harrison's mind, saw her frown perplexedly, and then saw her brow clear.

She took a deep breath and looked at him. "I hadn't thought of that. Of

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course, it is the only thing to be done."

There were a series of thumps on the floor above. Nurse Harrison started.

"It's my old lady, Miss Bristow. She's waked up from her rest. I must go. Yes, M. Poirot, I think you are quite right. A postmortem will settle the business once and for all. It will scotch the whole thing and all these dreadful rumors will die down."

Hercule Poirot walked along to the post office. He had a London call.

The voice at the other end was petulant:

"Must you go nosing out these things, my dear Poirot? Are you sure it's a case for us? You know what these country town rumors usually amount to — nothing at all."

"This is a special case."

"Oh well — if you say so. You have such a tiresome habit of being right. But if it's all a mare's nest we shan't be pleased with you, you know." Poirot smiled to himself.

Emerging into the post office, he leaned across the counter. He said in his most engaging tones: "Can you by any chance tell me, Madame, where Beatrice, the maid who was formerly with Dr. Oldfield, now resides?"

"Beatrice King? She's with Mrs. Marley over the Bank now."

Poirot thanked her, bought a book of stamps, and during the purchase contrived to bring the death of the late Mrs. Oldfield into the conversation. He was quick to note the peculiar furtive expression that stole across the postmistress's face. She said:

"Very sudden, wasn't it? It's made a lot of talk as you may have heard." A gleam of interest came into her eyes. "Maybe that's what you'd be wanting to see Beatrice for? We all thought it odd the way she was got out of there all of a sudden. Somebody thought she knew something — and maybe she did. She's dropped some broad hints."

Beatrice King was a short, sly-looking girl. She presented an appearance of stolid stupidity, but her eyes were more intelligent. There was nothing to be got out of Beatrice King, it seemed. She repeated:

"I don't know nothing about anything. It's not for me to say what went on up there. I don't know what you mean by overhearing a conversation between the doctor and Miss Moncrieffe. I'm not one to go listening to doors. I don't know nothing."

Poirot said: "Have you ever heard of poisoning by arsenic?"

A flicker of interest came into her sullen face. She said: "So that's what it was in the bottle?"

"What bottle?"

"One of the bottles of medicine what that Miss Moncrieffe made up for the Missus. Nurse was all upset — I could see that. Tasted it, she did, and smelt it, and then poured it away down the sink and filled it up with plain water from the tap. It was white like water anyway. And once when Miss Moncrieffe took up a pot of tea to the Missus, Nurse brought it down again and made it fresh — said it hadn't been made with boiling water but that was just my eye, that was.

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Thought it was just the sort of fussing way nurses have at the time."

"Did you like Miss Moncrieffe?"

"I didn't mind her. A bit of standoffish. Of course, I always knew as she was sweet on the doctor."

Again Poirot nodded his head. He went back to the inn. There he gave certain instructions to Georges.

Dr. Alan Garcia rubbed his hands and twinkled at Hercule Poirot. He said: "Well, this suits you, M. Poirot, I suppose?"

"It suits me admirably!"

The following day he once more took a train to Market Loughborough. With him was a large burly-looking gentleman.

Market Loughborough had buzzed mildly ever since the exhumation proceedings. Now that the findings of the autopsy were out, excitement had reached fever heat. Poirot and his companion had been at the inn for about an hour and had just finished a hearty lunch when word was brought to Poirot that a lady was waiting to see him.

The two men adjourned to an upstairs sitting room, where they found Nurse Harrison waiting. Her face was white and haggard. She said, "Is this true? Is this really true, M. Poirot?"

He put her gently into a chair. "Yes. More than sufficient arsenic to cause death has been found."

"I never thought — I never thought —" She burst into tears.

Poirot said gently: "The truth had to come out, you know."

She sobbed: "Will they hang him?"

"There is a warrant out for his arrest, but there is a lot that has to be proved still. Opportunity — access to poison —"

"But supposing, M. Poirot, that he had nothing to do with it — at all."

"In that case, he will be acquitted."

Nurse Harrison said slowly: "There is something — something that, I suppose, I ought to have told you before — but I didn't think that there was really anything in it. It was just *queer*."

"I knew there was something," said Poirot. "You had better tell it to us now."

"It isn't much. It's just that one day when I went down to the dispensary for something, Jean Moncrieffe was doing something rather — odd."

"Yes?"

"It sounds so silly. It's only that she was filling up her powder compact — a pink enamel one."

"Yes?"

"But, you see, she wasn't filling it up with powder — with face powder, I mean. She was tipping something into it from one of the bottles out of the poison cupboard. When she saw me she started and shut it up and whipped it into her bag — and put back the bottle quickly into the cupboard so that I couldn't see what it was. I daresay it doesn't mean anything — but now that I know — well, I've wondered."

Poirot glanced at his burly companion. He said: "Have you got a

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search warrant?"

Detective Sergeant Grey nodded. He went out. Poirot and Nurse Harrison waited. Poirot sighed.

Nurse Harrison said: "What are you thinking of?"

"The pity of things. . . ."

Nurse Harrison said: "I don't believe for a minute *he* knew anything about it."

"No. I am sure he did not."

The door opened and Detective Sergeant Grey came in. He had something in his hand, wrapped in a silk handkerchief. He unwrapped it and set it carefully down. It was a bright rose-pink enamel compact. Nurse Harrison said: "That's the one I saw."

Grey said: "Found it pushed right to the back of Miss Moncrieffe's bureau drawer. Inside a handkerchief sachet. As far as I can see there are no fingerprints on it, but I'll be careful."

With the handkerchief over his hand he pressed the spring. The case flew open. Grey said: "This stuff isn't face powder."

He dipped a finger and tasted it gingerly. "No particular taste."

Poirot said: "White arsenic does not taste."

Grey said: "It will be analyzed at once." He looked at Nurse Harrison. "You can swear to this being the same case?"

"Yes. I'm positive. That's the case I saw Miss Moncrieffe with in the dispensary about a week before Mrs. Oldfield's death."

Sergeant Grey sighed. He looked at Poirot and nodded. The latter rang the bell. "Send my servant here, please."

Georges entered and looked inquiringly at his master. Hercule Poirot said: "You have identified this powder compact, Miss Harrison, as one you saw in the possession of Miss Moncrieffe over a year ago. Would you be surprised to learn that this particular case was sold by Messrs. Brown and Sons *only a week ago* and that, moreover, it is of a pattern and color that has only been manufactured *since three months ago?*"

Nurse Harrison gasped. She stared at Poirot, her eyes round and dark.

Poirot said: "Have you seen this compact before, Georges?"

"Yes, sir. I observed this person, Nurse Harrison, purchase it at Brown's last Friday week. Pursuant to your instructions, I followed this lady whenever she went out. She took a bus over to Darnington on the day I have mentioned and purchased this compact. She took it home with her. Later the same day, she came to the house in which Miss Moncrieffe lodges. Acting as by your instructions, I was already in the house. I observed her go into Miss Moncrieffe's bedroom and hide this in the back of the bureau drawer. I had a good view through the crack of the door. She then left the house, believing herself unobserved. I may say that no one locks their doors down here."

Poirot turned to Nurse Harrison. His voice was hard: "Can you explain these facts, Nurse Harrison? I think not. There was no arsenic in that box

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when it left Messrs. Brown & Sons. But there was when it left your house. It was unwise of you to keep a supply of arsenic in your possession."

Nurse Harrison buried her face in her hands. She said in a low dull voice: "It's true — it's all true . . . I killed her. And all for nothing — nothing . . . I was *mad*."

Jean Moncrieffe said: "I must ask you to forgive me, M. Poirot. I have been so angry with you — so terribly angry with you. It seemed that you were making things so much worse."

Poirot said with a smile: "So I was to begin with. It is like the old legend of the Lernean Hydra. Every time a head was cut off, two heads grew in its place. So, to begin with, the rumors grew and multiplied.

"But you see my task, like that of my namesake Hercules, was to reach the first — the original head. Who had started this rumor? It did not take me long to discover that the originator of the story was Nurse Harrison. I went to see her. She appeared to be a very charming woman — intelligent and sympathetic. But almost at once she made a bad mistake — she repeated to me a conversation which she had overheard between you and the doctor, and that conversation *was all wrong*. It was psychologically most unlikely. If you and the doctor had planned together to kill Mrs. Oldfield, you are both of you far too intelligent and level-headed to hold such a conversation in a room with an open door, easily overheard by anyone on the stairs or in the kitchen.

"Moreover, the words assigned to you did not fit in at all with your mental make-up. They were the words of a much older woman and of a quite different type, words such as would be imagined by Nurse Harrison as being used by herself in like circumstances.

"I had up to then regarded the whole matter as fairly simple. Nurse Harrison, I realized, was a still attractive woman — she had been thrown closely with Dr. Oldfield for nearly three years — the doctor had been very fond of her and grateful to her for her tact and sympathy. She had formed the impression that if Mrs. Oldfield died, the doctor would probably ask her to marry him. But instead of that, after Mrs. Oldfield's death, she learns that Dr. Oldfield is in love with you. Angry and jealous, she starts spreading the rumor that Dr. Oldfield has poisoned his wife.

"That, as I say, was how I had visualized the position up to now. But the trite old phrase 'no smoke without fire' recurred to me significantly. I wondered if Nurse Harrison had done more than spread a rumor? Certain things she said rang strangely. She told me that Mrs. Oldfield's illness was largely imaginary — and she did not really suffer much pain. But the doctor himself had been in no doubt about the reality of his wife's suffering. He himself had not been surprised by her death. He had called in another doctor shortly before her death and the other doctor had realized the gravity of her condition. I

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brought forward the suggestion of exhumation. Nurse Harrison was at first frightened out of her wits by the idea. Then, almost at once, her jealousy and hatred took command of her. She would go through with it — the doctor and Jean Moncrieffe should suffer.

"There was only one hope. To make Nurse Harrison overreach herself. There was a chance that Jean Moncrieffe would escape. I fancied that Nurse Harrison would strain every nerve to involve her in the crime. I gave instructions to Georges — the most unobtrusive of men — whom she did not know by sight. He was to follow her closely."

Jean said: "You've been wonderful."

Dr. Oldfield chimed in. "I can never thank you enough. What a blind fool I was."

Poirot said: "Were you so blind, Mademoiselle?"

Jean said: "I was terribly worried. The arsenic in the poison cupboard didn't tally."

Oldfield cried: "Jean — you didn't think?"

"No. What I did think was that Mrs. Oldfield had somehow or other got hold of it — she could easily get your key when you were in the bathroom — and that she was taking it so as to be ill and get sympathy and that she had inadvertently taken too much. But I was afraid that if there was an autopsy and arsenic was found they would never consider that theory and would leap to the conclusion that you'd done it. That's why I never said anything about the missing arsenic. I even cooked the poison book. But the last person I would ever have suspected was Nurse Harrison."

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In his testimonial to EQMM, John Dickson Carr wrote: "What I look for is not a clumsy concoction of boy-meets-girl-with-detective-incidents, but a detective story with an original idea. That's what I find in every issue of EQMM." One of the reasons our good friend John finds originality in EQMM is James Yaffe — for even when young Mr. Yaffe draws on past glory, he adds his own inimitable touch. Yaffe has a flair for "ideas," a talent for ingenuity. Even more important, his work breathes a youthful spontaneity that is irresistible. In a recent letter to your Editor, Mr. Carr asked: "What news of the Department of Impossible Crimes? — I wait with avidity."

Here, John, is the new Yaffe story of the D.I.C. Actually it was written before "Cul de Sac" and "The Problem of the Emperor's Mushrooms," but for good and sufficient reasons, now well-known to you and all other loyal EQMMers, publication was delayed until Mr. Yaffe could make his criminological come-back.

Hail the conquering hero!

THE COMIC OPERA MURDERS

by JAMES YAFFE

INSPECTOR STANLEY FLEDGE
NEW YORK CITY HOMICIDE BUREAU
NEW YORK, N. Y.

DEAR LESTRADE,

ARRIVED SAFELY AT OXFORD MAINE THIS MORNING. FISHING IS WONDERFUL. HUNTING IS WONDERFUL. SWIMMING IS WONDERFUL. LIFE IS WONDERFUL. LETTER WILL FOLLOW.

PAUL

Inspector Stanley Fledge
New York City Homicide Bureau
New York, N. Y.

Dear Minion of the Law,

You have no idea what life is really like until you've spent part of it on your back in a rowboat in the middle of Lake Thompson. The water here is as cool as a morgue slab; the sunset as red as the Commissioner's bald spot; and existence is as peaceful as a corpse. Believe me, this is the way to live.

I know, of course, that you thought I'd never do it. A hundred times I saw that smug, skeptical smile on your face. "Have your fun, you optimist!" it said, "Stay up nights looking at road maps and travel folders! Waste your money on expensive fishing tackle! You'll end up by spending your summer right here at the Homicide Bureau, sweating over a hot fingerprint!"

Excuse me, then, if I murmur a mild "I told you so." Having looked forward to this vacation for fifteen

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years, I never intended that the sarcastic sneers of an envious old cop should spoil my fun. I made up my mind to do it — and in spite of your bad wishes, I did it.

I'll have to cut this off now. It is time for my guide, an ancient and grizzled citizen named Basil, to drive me into the nearby town to buy fishing tackle. I really don't need any fishing tackle, but Basil fascinates me. He speaks an amazing and completely bewildering backwoods dialect which, as soon as I decipher it, will be the basis for a hell of a crossword puzzle.

Comfortably yours,

Paul

Mr. Paul Dawn
Mahoosic Lodge
Oxford, Me.

Dear Paul,

Feeling mighty pleased with yourself, aren't you? Well, I just want you to know that I'm still not convinced. I give exactly two weeks to this big game hunt of yours. At the end of two weeks, you're going to be sick and tired of tracking down trout and snapping handcuffs on wild moose. You'll bundle yourself on to the first train back to New York — fishing tackle, bear skin, sun tan, and all. And I'll be waiting at the station to give you the horse laugh. A man who's been solving impossible crimes for fifteen years isn't so easily satisfied with shadowing a school of salmon.

Have a good time while it lasts,

Fledge

P.S. So far I haven't found anybody to take over the Department of Impossible Crimes in your absence. A pity, too, because I ran across an impossible disappearance the other day that's right in your line.

Inspector Stanley Fledge
New York City Homicide Bureau
New York, N. Y.

Dear Fledge,

Shades of Diana! I went hunting today and bagged my first prize, and what's more, Basil says that I acquitted myself like a veteran. I tracked the beast for nearly a mile, through dense woods and dark forest, sticking to his trail only by the rustling of leaves as he scampered through the underbrush. It was suspenseful, nerve-wracking — and then I finally cornered him under a pile of dead twigs. I raised my gun to my shoulder, took steady aim, and without batting an eyelash pulled the trigger. The first shot nearly did away with Basil! The second shot, however, went cleanly through the target. And there he was, lying on his back, looking proud and fierce — and giving off the damnedest smell — a big, dead skunk! Remind me to send you the carcass for your birthday.

Love,

Frank Buck

P.S. You are about as subtle, Fledge, as a steam-roller. Did you really think that your painfully casual reference to an "impossible disappearance" would arouse my

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interest? I am amused that you should have stooped to such a puerile trick. Make no mistake about it, I have no intention of concerning myself with the sordid doings of the Homicide Squad.

Mr. Paul Dawn
Mahoosic Lodge
Oxford, Me.

Dear Paul,

I read your letter eagerly, and it warmed my heart, actually warmed my heart, to find out how much fun you're having. I was never very keen on skunk-hunting myself, but if that's the sort of thing you like to do then I'm really happy for you.

I mentioned an impossible disappearance in my last letter, an extremely peculiar case which I'm sure you want to hear more about. I realize, of course, that you are enjoying your vacation, so I will be careful not to go into detail about this case. I will restrict myself to a brief list of its more outstanding peculiarities.

The victim disappeared into thin air in front of witnesses.

On the very spot on the floor where the victim had been standing was found — of all things! — a small piece of sealing wax.

A mysterious note arrived at the police station the next day, claiming that the victim had been "melted in wax" by a sorcerer. It was signed by someone calling himself *The Lord High Executioner.*

The disappearance occurred within a week of two peculiar murders, both of which had also been followed by notes from *The Lord High Executioner.*

But I do not want to bother you any longer with professional matters.

Your pal,

Fledge

Inspector Stanley Fledge
New York City Homicide Bureau
New York, N. Y.

Dear Inspector,

Once and for all, get it into your head that I do not give a hoot about your sealing wax, Lord High Executioner, and impossible disappearance. Your obvious attempt to get me interested in them was a failure, a pitiful and dismal failure! I positively, absolutely, unquestionably, refuse to give you any advice on the case. Furthermore, if you persist in spoiling my vacation with your odious communications, I shall personally instruct the Governor of Maine to secede from the Union.

Love,

The Misanthrope

Mr. Paul Dawn
Mahoosic Lodge
Oxford, Me.

Dear Paul,

I appreciate your feelings completely. Had I known how much my letter would upset you, I never would have written it. From now on, I shall not so much as mention the Comic Opera Murders. I will not even ex-

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plain to you that they have been called the Comic Opera Murders because of a certain odd coincidence. I won't even bother to tell you what the coincidence is, that all three murders were planned and executed over fifty years ago *in the works of Gilbert and Sullivan!* Indeed, it is best that you know nothing of these things.

Your chum,

Fledge

INSPECTOR STANLEY FLEDGE
NEW YORK CITY HOMICIDE BUREAU
NEW YORK, N. Y.

DEAR FLEDGE,

WILL NOT ALLOW YOUR CHILDISH DROOLINGS TO SPOIL MY VACATION. DEFINITELY REFUSE TO LISTEN.

PAUL

MR. PAUL DAWN
MAHOOSIC LODGE
OXFORD, ME.

DEAR PAUL,

WOULD NOT SPOIL YOUR VACATION FOR ANYTHING. THOUGHT YOU'D LIKE TO KNOW THAT MAYOR IS UP IN ARMS ABOUT COMIC OPERA MURDERS. GILBERT AND SULLIVAN ESTATES THREATEN TO SUE.

FLEDGE

INSPECTOR STANLEY FLEDGE
NEW YORK CITY HOMICIDE BUREAU
NEW YORK, N. Y.

DEAR FLEDGE,

GO TO HELL.

PAUL

MR. PAUL DAWN
MAHOOSIC LODGE
OXFORD, ME.

DEAR PAUL,

FLATTERY WILL GET YOU NOWHERE. NEW DEVELOPMENT IN COMIC OPERA MURDERS. ANALYSIS OF SEALING WAX REVEALS TRACES OF HUMAN HAIR. HOW'S THE FISHING?

FLEDGE

INSPECTOR STANLEY FLEDGE
NEW YORK CITY HOMICIDE BUREAU
NEW YORK, N. Y.

DEAR BENEDICT ARNOLD,

ALL RIGHT, STINKER, YOU WIN. DISTURB MY REST. SHATTER MY PEACE. DESTROY MY COMFORT. TELL ME ABOUT YOUR DAMNED COMIC OPERA MURDERS. POLICEMAN'S LOT IS NOT A HAPPY ONE.

PAUL

Mr. Paul Dawn
Mahoosic Lodge
Oxford, Me.

Dear Paul,

Your request for more information about the Comic Opera Murders came as a complete surprise to me. First you left the city in order to get away from the bloody side of life — and now you've decided to concern yourself in our sordid doings. All right, then —

The first murder occurred about two weeks ago, on the day the D'Arcy-Blunt Comic Opera Company was scheduled to open in a series of Gilbert and Sullivan revivals. The D'Arcy-

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Blunt Company has been giving Gilbert and Sullivan in London and New York for sixty years, ever since the first D'Arcy-Blunt presented *Ruddigore* in competition with Sir William Gilbert's own production. The New York opening was to be quite a social event.

The leading tenor in the D'Arcy-Blunt Company was Thomas Willow — a great favorite with the connoisseurs — who had been singing Gilbert and Sullivan heroes for nearly seventeen years. Willow was a tall, handsome fellow, very egotistical and much too fond of gambling. As a result, though he drew a larger salary than anyone else in the company, he was often badly in need of money. Willow was also a ladies' man and went around trying to prove it, a bad habit which usually landed him in trouble. One time he ended up in a hospital with some broken bones, because Tony Arnstruther, the leading comedian, caught him making love to his (Arnstruther's) wife.

Tuesday night, the D'Arcy-Blunt Company was going to open its season with *The Mikado*. Tuesday morning, Willow was seen at the final rehearsal, dressed in the costume of the hero, Nanki-Poo, a part he had played several hundred times before. Tuesday afternoon, passengers on a ferryboat saw Willow's body floating in the Hudson River. He was still wearing his Nanki-Poo costume. The cause of death was undoubtedly drowning.

I passed the whole thing off as the routine suicide of a desperate man with too many gambling debts.

The next day the first note arrived in the afternoon mail. The note had been mailed the previous night at a downtown post office. It was neatly typewritten on a sheet of cheap stationery, and contained a short quotation from Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado*.

"*. . . He sobbed and he sighed*
And a gurgle he gave,
Then he plunged himself into
The billowy wave —
Oh willow, titwillow, titwillow . . ."

And the note was signed: *The Lord High Executioner.*

It was uncanny, Paul. It sent the shivers up my spine. On a perfectly ordinary day sixty years ago, Gilbert and Sullivan wrote a song about a Tom Tit, a titwillow, who plunged into a river. Sixty years later, a songbird named Thomas Willow plunged into the billowy Hudson River. Probably with the help of The Lord High Executioner.

The first thing I did after I read that note was go out and buy a copy of The Complete Works of Gilbert and Sullivan, and look up that quotation from *The Mikado*. I discovered two things about it that seem interesting. The "titwillow" quotation comes from a song which is sung by a comedy character named Ko-Ko, *otherwise known as The Lord High Executioner!* The part of The Lord High Executioner has been played in the D'Arcy-Blount Company for more than twenty years by the leading

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comedian, Tony Arnstruther, the same Tony Arnstruther who nearly beat Thomas Willow to death for making love to his wife.

I worried about this until Thursday evening when the second murder occurred, this time right on the stage of the theatre in front of a swanky audience. The second victim was Sir Herbert D'Arcy-Blunt himself, producer and owner of the company, along with his wife. Sir Herbert, a Gilbert-and-Sullivan-ite of the old school, was a highly superstitious old man who believed that unless he himself appeared on the stage at some time during the performance it was bound to fail miserably. Every performance for twenty years, Sir Herbert would come down to the theatre, change into his costume, and walk out in front of the audience as an obscure member of the chorus. In the stormiest weather, in the middle of an attack of pneumonia, Sir Herbert would struggle out of bed in order to attend the performance. Even in later years, while suffering from a bad case of the gout, Sir Herbert refused to give up his duties with the chorus.

On the night of his murder, Sir Herbert was on stage for the finale of *The Gondoliers*. It was a loud, raucous scene, with the entire cast singing and drinking glasses of wine. Somebody gave Sir Herbert a glass, he raised it into the air along with the rest of the chorus, and then he tossed it off in one gulp. Two minutes later he toppled over on the stage; by the time the curtain was lowered, he was dead. There was enough cyanide in his wine to kill the whole chorus.

I tried to find out who had given Sir Herbert his glass, but nobody could tell me anything. The cast had been too busy singing and drinking, and the audience had been too busy watching the cast; nobody had paid the least bit of attention to Sir Herbert; he might have been poisoned by anyone who was on the stage at the finale. Tony Arnstruther had been standing near him. So had every other principal in the company.

I found a note lying on my desk when I arrived at the office the next morning. It had been typewritten on the same cheap paper and mailed the previous morning. It contained a short quotation from Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Gondoliers*.

". . . A taste for drink combined with gout
Had doubled him up forever.
Of that there is no manner of doubt —
No probable, possible shadow of doubt —
No possible doubt whatever . . ."

The note was signed: *The Lord High Executioner.*

I was now convinced that The Lord High Executioner was some sort of maniac with a Gilbert and Sullivan complex. I sent out inquiries to all the nearby asylums about escaped lunatics. I was still waiting for results two days later when the third crime, the impossible disappearance, took place.

Walter Lanier, a young baritone who sings the parts of villains in the

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company, had told several members of the cast about a rich old uncle of his who lived in South America. He never mentioned, however, that his uncle was going to pay him a visit. Saturday afternoon, after the matinée, while young Lanier was in his dressing room taking off his make-up, his Uncle Peter appeared at the stage door. Andy, the old doorkeeper, who has been with the theatre for God knows how many years, showed the rich old uncle to his nephew's dressing room. Uncle Peter knocked on the door, announced who he was; Lanier seemed surprised, but he called out for him to come in. Uncle Peter went in and shut the door behind him; and that was the last Andy saw of him.

It was not, however, the last he heard of him. Andy, being an inquisitive soul, especially about prosperous-looking strangers, dropped to his knees and proceeded to listen at the keyhole. He heard Lanier suddenly, in a loud voice, ask "Uncle Peter" who he was. Then, after the old man's reply, he heard Lanier insist that this man was an imposter, and order him out of the room. Uncle Peter protested some more; Lanier got madder and madder; all of a sudden there was a thud, and then a grunt. After that, Andy could hear nothing more.

Well, the old doorkeeper began to get worried after a while. He knocked on the door several times. No answer. He tried to open it. But it was locked from inside. Andy called for a couple of stagehands. They rammed the door open, and found Lanier lying on the floor with a sizeable bump on his head, and groaning something like: "Imposter — make-up job!"

When Lanier finally came around, he said the man who pretended to be his uncle, the imposter, reminded him vaguely of someone in the D'Arcy-Blunt Company.

"But where is he?" Lanier demanded, looking around.

Andy swore "Uncle Peter" hadn't left by the dressing-room door.

"But there's no other way to get out of the room!" Lanier exclaimed. "My God, it's impossible!"

And my God! it was. We searched the dressing room, the closet, the small connecting washroom — no sign of "Uncle Peter," no sign of a secret exit, no sign of anything. And Andy had been watching the only possible exit every minute of the time. "Uncle Peter" seemed to have melted away.

It was while I was searching the floor that I found, on the spot where Uncle Peter had been standing, a small piece of sealing wax. It meant nothing to me, nor to Walter Lanier who said he had never seen it before. But the next day I received another note, postmarked the previous morning, containing a quotation from Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Sorcerer:*

". . . *If you want a proud foe to make tracks —*
If you'd melt a rich uncle in wax —
You've but to look in
On our resident Djinn . . ."

It's impossible, Paul! Dizzily,

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crazily, beautifully impossible! This is the twentieth century. There are no sorcerers. There are no Djinns. Not even little Djinns. People don't go around melting phoney uncles in wax. At least not in the best circles.

I'm getting damned fed up with this Lord High Executioner's gruesome sense of humor.

Exasperatingly yours,

Fledge

Inspector Stanley Fledge
New York City Homicide Bureau
New York, N. Y.

Dear Fledge,

I spent a pleasant morning lying on my back and forming a mental picture of the hell that must have broken loose around you because of your inability to find the Comic Opera murderer. Has the Commissioner threatened to make you a Sergeant?

Your frantic account of the Comic Opera Murders makes it perfectly clear that you, Fledge, have succeeded in doing nothing in particular about finding the killer, and doing it very well. It was high time that a professional stepped in to rescue the case from the miserable bungling of amateurs. An idea has already taken root in my mind; I have a small glimmering as to who your Lord High Executioner is and what he wants; but I cannot possibly reach a final conclusion without the answers to several extremely important questions. I have, therefore, emulated one of Gilbert's characters and "made a little list." Try to answer these as carefully as you can.

1. How long after the discovery of Thomas Willow's body did the newspapers carry the story of his death?
2. What was the man who claimed to be Walter Lanier's Uncle Peter wearing when he visited his nephew?
3. Who, besides The Lord High Executioner, might have wanted to get rid of Sir Herbert D'Arcy-Blunt?
4. Which member of the company plays the part of Dick Deadeye in *H.M.S. Pinafore?*
5. According to Andy, the doorkeeper, what *exactly* did the false Uncle Peter say and do from the time he appeared at the stage door to the time he entered his nephew's dressing room?

Now don't jump out of your chair, Fledge, because I'm absolutely serious. These are the questions I want you to answer. And hurry up about it, too.

Impatiently yours,

Paul

Mr. Paul Dawn
Mahoosic Lodge
Oxford, Me.

Dear Paul,

I spent the last two days finding the answers to your screwy questions, and frankly, I'm more mixed up than ever. Do you really expect these answers to do you any good?

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1. How long after the discovery of Thomas Willow's body did the newspapers carry the story of his death?

Roughly an hour. Willow's body was discovered at 4:17 in the afternoon. At about 5:20 the first newspaper carrying the story was on the streets.

2. What was the man who claimed to be Walter Lanier's Uncle Peter wearing when he visited his nephew?

According to Lanier, he was wearing a big, grey overcoat, a muffler, a derby hat, and a pair of rimless spectacles. Andy, the doorkeeper, confirms the overcoat, the muffler, and the derby; says he didn't notice the spectacles; says he didn't notice anything about Uncle Peter except that he was a "mighty round gentleman."

3. Who, besides The Lord High Executioner, might have wanted to get rid of Sir Herbert D'Arcy-Blunt?

Plenty of people.

Mrs. Herbert D'Arcy-Blunt — because she was twenty years younger than her husband and interested in younger men, from what I hear; because she inherits five hundred thousand dollars and the D'Arcy-Blunt Comic Opera Company.

Tony Arnstruther — because a week before his murder, Sir Herbert told Arnstruther that he was "a broken-down old comic," that he was washed up in Gilbert and Sullivan, and that he was going to be fired at the end of the run.

Walter Lanier — because he had become entirely too friendly with Mrs. D'Arcy-Blunt; because he is not a very wealthy young man and Mrs. D'Arcy-Blunt *is* a wealthy widow.

Mrs. Tony Arnstruther — for the same reasons as her husband.

Andy — because D'Arcy-Blunt, the day before his death, had quarrelled with him, insulted him, and generally tore into the poor old man.

4. Which member of the company plays the part of Dick Deadeye in *H.M.S. Pinafore?*

God knows why you want to find out, but the answer is Walter Lanier. He specializes in "heavies."

5. According to Andy, what exactly did Uncle Peter say and do from the time he appeared at the stage door to the time he entered his nephew's dressing room?

Very little. He approached Andy at the stage door. "How do you do?" he said. "Could I see Mr. Walter Lanier?" Andy asked him if he was expected. "I believe I am," Uncle Peter said. Then Andy led him in silence to Walter Lanier's dressing room. At the dressing-room door, Uncle Peter knocked. "Walter," he said. "It's Uncle Peter!" Lanier made some sort of a reply from inside the dressing room. Uncle Peter then opened the door, walked in, and closed the door behind him.

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Well, there you are, Paul! Now, who do I arrest — Gilbert or Sullivan?

Fledge

INSPECTOR STANLEY FLEDGE
NEW YORK CITY HOMICIDE BUREAU
NEW YORK, N. Y.

DEAR FLEDGE,

DID UNCLE PETER TALK IN DEEP BASS VOICE ON AFTERNOON OF HIS DISAPPEARANCE? ASK ANDY.

PAUL

MR. PAUL DAWN
MAHOOSIC LODGE
OXFORD, ME.

DEAR PAUL,

ARE YOU GETTING PSYCHIC? ANDY SAYS UNCLE PETER TALKED IN VERY DEEP VOICE. WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

FLEDGE

INSPECTOR STANLEY FLEDGE
NEW YORK CITY HOMICIDE BUREAU
NEW YORK, N. Y.

DEAR FLEDGE,

ARREST WALTER LANIER FOR MURDER IMMEDIATELY. LETTER FOLLOWS.

PAUL

Inspector Stanley Fledge
New York City Homicide Bureau
New York, N. Y.

Dear Fledge,

Things are seldom what they seem.

Gilbert and Sullivan said it sixty years ago, but apparently you have forgotten it.

The murder of Thomas Willow was not what it seemed. I realized that as soon as I read your description of Willow's death and was struck by one puzzling inconsistency. Uncle Peter disappeared late in the afternoon. The next day you received a note which had been mailed the *previous morning — before* his disappearance. After D'Arcy-Blunt was killed, you received a note which had been mailed the *previous morning* — again, *before* his murder. But after Thomas Willow died, you received a note which had not been mailed until the *previous night* — this time, *after* the discovery of the body. Why did The Lord High Executioner write the Thomas Willow note *after* the crime occurred, rather than *before*, as in the other two crimes? Simply because The Lord High Executioner did not know that Thomas Willow had died *until after the discovery of the body!* Because Thomas Willow's death was not what it seemed! *Because Thomas Willow was not murdered at all: he committed suicide*, just as you originally suspected! Because The Lord High Executioner did not find out about Willow's death until he read about it in the evening newspapers.

The murderer, a clever individual with no designs against Thomas Willow at all, bought a newspaper some time after 5:20 on the evening of Willow's suicide. Our murderer was an opportunist; the story in the newspaper suggested to him a way in which he could use Willow's death for his own advantage. After a few hours of planning, he emerged with the

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blueprint of an ingenious plot worthy of the great Gilbert himself. The first step in the plot was to concoct a mysterious note which would serve to make the Homicide Squad believe that a maniac with a Gilbert and Sullivan complex was on the loose. Our murderer sat down at a typewriter and dashed off the first note, decorating it with all the conventional sinister trappings and signing it melodramatically *The Lord High Executioner*. He depended upon your fertile imagination to do the rest. You were completely taken in, of course; you believed implicitly in The Lord High Executioner; you made elaborate preparations to hunt for a lunatic, not for a sane and methodical killer.

Why, you ask, did the murderer bother to create the real-life character of The Lord High Executioner and make him responsible for Willow's death? The answer: because the murderer needed a scapegoat for his murder of Herbert D'Arcy-Blunt. The D'Arcy-Blunt murder was not what it seemed, either. You believed it to be just one in a chain of murders committed by a madman; actually the D'Arcy-Blunt murder was the *one important crime*. All along, the one thing our murderer really wanted was to kill D'Arcy-Blunt and later to marry his rich, young widow. The Lord High Executioner, the mysterious notes, the Willow "murder," the disappearance of "Uncle Peter" — all these illusions were just sugar-coating to take your mind off the pill!

Having killed Sir Herbert, our murderer was still not quite satisfied. If The Lord High Executioner ceased activity after committing only two murders, the police might become suspicious — especially of the last murder; they might start an uncomfortable investigation of our murderer's relations with D'Arcy-Blunt's wife. In short, there had to be another murder, a third and final murder, to *clinch the myth* of The Lord High Executioner once and for all. And yet, if possible, our murderer wanted to avoid taking another life. He found the solution in "Uncle Peter."

I wonder if you noticed several odd things about Walter Lanier's "Uncle Peter." First of all, he was obviously a phoney, impersonated by a member of the company who has not yet come forward. But why has the impersonator not admitted the impersonation, if he is not The Lord High Executioner? Conclusion: Uncle Peter *is* The Lord High Executioner. And yet, the last note, the wax, and all the other circumstances, indicate that Uncle Peter was *disposed of* by The Lord High Executioner. Corrected conclusion: Uncle Peter is *not* the Executioner. Then how explain this peculiar paradox?

Well, what sort of entrance did Uncle Peter make? He approached the old doorkeeper at the stage door, bundled up in a big grey overcoat and a muffler; he mumbled a few words in a deep bass voice — *the kind of voice traditionally used by Gilbert and Sullivan heavies*. When he reached the door of his nephew's dressing room, he called out a quick "It's Uncle

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Peter!", waited for an apparent answer, and dodged hastily into the room, without uttering another word.

"So what?" I can hear you asking. Just this! Andy never actually saw Walter Lanier and his Uncle Peter *together!* He heard them talking together — from behind a closed door. He heard Lanier ask who "Uncle Peter" was; he heard the "argument" that Uncle Peter was an imposter. He heard two *voices* — but he never saw *two people.*

You must realize now what I'm getting at: *one person played two parts.* One person used two voices — a simple feat for a professional actor. And who could this one person be? Well, who was found in the dressing room? *Only Lanier!* Therefore, "Uncle Peter" must have been Lanier himself!

Once you accept this fact, you discover how easily the problem of "Uncle Peter's" impossible transformation into a piece of sealing wax (left on the floor deliberately — to tie in with the Gilbert and Sullivan text) clears itself up. Walter Lanier was equipped with a great deal of make-up, and he was used to making himself up as an elderly man, having played the part of Dick Deadeye in the company's *Pinafore.* On the afternoon of Uncle Peter's arrival, Lanier stuffed himself with a couple of pillows, applied his Uncle Peter face, bundled into an overcoat, a muffler, and a derby, and appeared at the stage door as his own relative from South America. He was careful, of course, not to say too much to the doorkeeper, Andy, who knew him as Walter Lanier also.

Andy, however, was completely fooled. He conducted "Uncle Peter" to his nephew's dressing room and watched and listened, while the old man called out to himself, pretended to hear himself answer, entered his own room, "discovered" himself to be an impostor, faked a "struggle" with himself, and then proceeded to cause his own mysterious disappearance by simply washing off the make-up and becoming Walter Lanier once again.

Lanier did not *plan* to commit an impossible crime. Having removed his make-up, he intended simply to remain "unconscious" until he was discovered, and then raise the alarm, in this way providing The Lord High Executioner with a third victim. Andy, however, complicated the scheme by listening at the door. When Andy and the stagehands broke into Lanier's room and found him *alone,* Lanier must have had a bad moment. If he announced that the phoney uncle had disappeared, Andy's presence at the door would prove him a liar. But the uncle *had* disappeared.

So Lanier chose what he considered to be the lesser of two evils: "Where is that imposter?" he groaned (or words to that effect), and thus committed one of the neatest unintentional impossible crimes I've run across.

Let us hope, however, that Mr. Lanier himself will soon get a chance to behold The Lord High Executioner.

Triumphantly yours,

Paul

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A TALE OUT OF THE PAST

M. P. Shiel, the author of such epic romances as THE PURPLE CLOUD *and* THE LORD OF THE SEA, *has been called "brilliant" and "colossal" by H. G. Wells, "an inventor, a stylist, and a scholar" by Arnold Bennett, "a flaming genius" by Hugh Walpole. But in this introduction to Mr. Shiel's first appearance in "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine," we shall confine ourselves exclusively to Matthew Phipps Shiel, the detective-story writer.*

Mr. Shiel's first published work was PRINCE ZALESKI *(1895). Of this book Dorothy L. Sayers wrote: "*[PRINCE ZALESKI'S] *curious and elaborate beauty recaptures in every arabesque sentence the very accent of Edgar Allan Poe." It is a curious coincidence that Shiel, recreating a half-century later the very atmosphere and spirit of Poe, following in the very footsteps of Poe's purely intellectual ratiocination, should also have written three cases, no more, no less, about Prince Zaleski — exactly as Poe wrote three cases, no more, no less, about Dupin.*

In your Editor's THE DETECTIVE SHORT STORY: A BIBLIOGRAPHY *(1942), we made the statement that* PRINCE ZALESKI *was never published in the United States. The author himself gave us that information, but after fifty-one years of extraordinary literary achievement, Mr. Shiel can be pardoned a minor slip of the memory.* PRINCE ZALESKI *was published in America — by Roberts Bros. of Boston, also in 1895. Both editions — the English first and the American first — are extremely difficult to find these rare rare-book days. The London first edition was No. VII of "The Keynotes Series," published by John Lane, and was bound in purple cloth, of a deep shade peculiarly susceptible to the ravages of air and sunlight. Most copies turn up with badly faded spines — indeed, a copy whose spine still retains its pristine hue is the Ultima Thule of many a collector's bibliophilic barnstorming. The American first edition is equally scarce. Although it contains the original title-page and cover designed by Aubrey Beardsley, it is not as attractive a book as the coveted English edition; the American publisher changed the book-size and typography, and in the process forfeited the graceful proportions and artistic appearance of the original format. The American binding is also inferior; your Editor has two variants — a light blue and a light green cloth, both anemic compared with the English royal purple.*

But we have drifted (an inveterate habit of ours) into bibliobypaths. . . . The breathtaking question is: Did you know that M. P. Shiel created

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a short-story sleuth other than Prince Zaleski? Yes, he did, and so far as your Editor has been able to check, no mention has ever been made, historically or critically, of that other detective. His name is Cummings King Monk, and by strange coincidence again, he also lives in a trilogy, although only one of the three Monk stories is strictly a detective story.

The trinity of tales about Cummings King Monk are to be found in Mr. Shiel's rare volume (rarer by far than PRINCE ZALESKI*) called* THE PALE APE AND OTHER PULSES *(1911). This book was never published in the United States, so the appearance in "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine" of "Cummings Monk" (title and text slightly condensed by Mr. Shiel himself) brings to American fans for the first time an "unknown" detective story by one of the authentic old masters.*

And now we ask you to read "curious and elaborate beauty": a tale out of the past, out of the "Yellow Book" estheticism of the naughty Nineties, when young Shiel was a member of the exclusive literary coteries of London and Paris — companion and friend of Oscar Wilde, Pierre Louÿs, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Ernest Dowson; a tale of rich and redolent romanticism; a tale of bizarre bravado, Shielesque shenanigans, flamboyant and fantastic felony; a tale of wild, wilful and wily grotesquerie; a tale old-fashioned and bold-fashioned; a tale in which words are bright-plumed birds, phrases are intricate mazes, similes are never facsimiles, metaphors are delicious petit-fours; a tale that illustrates what Ralph Straus, the English critic, meant when he said that "Shiel is too gorgeously mad, too aloof from life as most people know it, but there is magic in his work."

CUMMINGS MONK

by M. P. SHIEL

I WAS down at Abbey How, Monk's house in the Cotswolds, when Monk's weakness of the eyes — for which he wore a button in one ear — came upon him, and now he would cower for days over a library-fire, tamed, a "shade" over his nose. In fact, our life was spent in the library, with every one of its procession of windows shuttered up, so that at midday we were as shut away from the sun as at midnight; and our consciousness that, from outside, the mansion had a look of having been deserted for ages may have confirmed our tendency to indolence, Monk mostly giving no sign of life, save an occasional shiver at the gales of autumn wawling all among the hills.

The reaction, however, in his case, was ever certain. A moment came when he stirred and stretched; then a

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sitting forward, a spring-up, a mutter, "By Jove, I'm hungry!"

For more things than one: for cities, and the storm of things. At the same time he cast the "shade" from his eyes, and said to me: "Do you know what I have been thinking there? That one of the big crimes would rouse and excite us."

"No doubt of that," I said: "against whom shall we commit it?"

"One needn't commit it oneself," he said: "what I mean is that we should first conceive the crime, construct it, then find out someone who is somewhere committing it in the world, and mix ourselves up generally in the trouble."

"But 'find out' in what possible way?" I asked, "and — with what motive?"

"Isn't crime, being a human thing, our business?" he said.

"But — really, Monk ——"

"Crimes — that is what I have been thinking — are of three sorts: little — usually heard of and punished; middle-sized — heard of, but not punished; and big — never heard of."

"What do you call 'big' crimes?" I asked.

"Those which, like Borgia's, Gilles de Rais', are large-minded and dark-minded in mood; and 'little' those which, like burglars' murders, are sordid in mood."

"Suppose, though," I said, "that there are no 'big crimes' going forward at present for us to 'mix ourselves up in'?"

And he: "But isn't everything going forward that ever was or will be — doomsdays, moonfalls, rackets of Nile-cataracts, births of whirling worlds? As for our own sun, never before, credit me, did he blaze more crazily red, or more dreadfully roar on his road — what a bustle and thrill the whole thing is! Big crimes enough, I should think."

"Well, I am willing," I said, "though I like the light of day, and have no wish to be shot. But how on earth — I can't even begin to conceive ——"

"Wait, we shall see; first, let's dine."

After dinner we returned to the library where at once Monk, as he said, "set to work," first assuring me that there was no doubt about the result, since he had several methods in his head, and, if one failed, every one would not. And now he proceeded to spend three hours in a heat of activity, pitching up ladder-steps, eagerly dashing through leaves, with now a grumble, now a shrug, a mutter, hunting the rainbow, to "give to airy nothing a local habitation and a name."

I saw him pry into A B C's, masses of Ordnance maps, through a shelf of old ledgers belonging to the insurance-branch of his House, piles of newspapers, books on science. At last he lit a cigar, cast himself down upon a couch, his arms behind his head, and laughed. It was then ten o'clock.

"Well?" I said.

"Look you," Monk answered, "since modern men are given by heredity a bent against 'sin,' it is under some

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compelling temptation that they commit it. Well, but in temptation there are two elements — wish, opportunity: so that, if I think of a 'sin,' and desire to find out who is committing it, I commence by discovering those who have a roaring opportunity for doing so. Now, suppose I conceive that someone wants, for some reason, to lure a stranger or so into his clutches, what are the ideal conditions as to 'opportunity' which I should seek? Those conditions occur in the case of a man living near one of two obscure railway-stations which have nearly the same name: so I found out the sixty such pairs of stations which exist in Europe, and wrote them down — one such pair being Stratton Eastern and Stratton Western in Scotland. Very good. Now, suppose, on discovering this fact, I discover also this constantly repeated advertisement: 'Summerdale Farm. Paying guests received. Every home comfort. Climate highly recommended by the Profession. Terms moderate. Near Stratton Western, Kincardine. Apply J. P., "Telegraph," Box No. 3715.' And suppose I moreover discover, firstly, that this climate, so highly recommended by the Profession, is the climate of a storm-swept coast, almost uninhabited; and secondly, that there is no record anywhere of any such farm in Kincardine as Summerdale Farm?"

"That might be ugly," I agreed.

"You see, of course," he went on, "what might happen to a 'paying guest' who starts to get to 'Summerdale Farm.' His friends, if he has any, know that he has gone to Stratton Western; his train arrives, let us say one evening, at Stratton Western; his luggage is put upon the local cab, if there is one — upon some species of thing with wheels — and now he gives the order 'Summerdale Farm.' However, his driver knows no Summerdale Farm — no one knows it — it doesn't, in fact, exist. But at last the idea inevitably strikes someone that the stranger has made a mistake — that the farm must be at Stratton Eastern, not at Stratton Western; and, sure at first though our stranger is that it is Western, not Eastern, finally, in his perplexity, and hunger, maybe, he is tempted to try Eastern, whither by the next train he goes. Here someone — maybe disguised — awaits him with a trap. 'Is not he the stranger expected at Summerdale Farm?' Yes. He enters that trap; and a trap it proves. He is driven, a long way perhaps, to a place which is not Summerdale Farm; and no trace from that moment remains of that man in this world."

"Well!" I exclaimed.

"Unless, indeed, the evil-doer has the imprudence to compromise himself by taking out a somewhat unusual number of policies of insurance ——"

"No! Is there someone at Stratton Eastern who has done that?"

"Not far from Stratton Eastern — a certain Sir Saul Ingram, as I see, residing at Feuding Manor thereabouts. Far be it from me to assert that this Sir Saul, who has taken out the policies, and the man who has

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advertised the fictitious farm, are the same. Still, I have a greed on me to see this Feuding Manor, and mean to go to it."

"Not — alone?"

"Yes, since I have a sort of guess in my head that Sir Saul Ingram may be a country squire of unquiet type; and you have said that you like the sun."

His eye twinkled, but his tone was decided. I did not know what to say; and when I woke the next morning my Monk had already taken train northward. At nine the same evening (as it was related to me afterwards) he arrived at Stratton Eastern.

There, after making a good many inquiries, he got to hear something of the whereabouts of Feuding Manor, miles away, and set off on foot over a tract of "links" — sand-dunes mixed with scrub — where the solitude was absolute, great guns of wind blowing a roar of breakers shoreward — wind with something in its tone which seemed to mean that here it was no visitor, but the king of that coast. Warned as he had been in regard to quicksands near the seaboard of the "links," and hearing the roar of breakers grow in his ears, as he dug his way head-foremost in the teeth of the gale, he was directing his course more westward; when a gust tugged his hat from his hands and head, and carted it into the dark. With the wind now at his right shoulder, he went on hatless for some forty minutes, till he found the ground begin to harden; and soon he was following a footpath through a wood of alders that presently thickened to a forest, where he could scarcely see his hand, and then anew thinned to a wood; through which he passed downwards by a path, and now found himself in a vale, enclosed by fells and scars; and he could make out before him a lake of water.

He thought that this ought to be the place: but, as he could discern nothing with any distinctness, he stood in uncertainty a little, until up burned the brim of the moon luridly above a scar; and now he could perceive the shape of a house, darksome, low, large, on an "ait," or island, lying in a mere.

No blink of light came out from it; but, without hesitation, Monk walked down to the edge of the mere; found a causeway of stone leading to the island; went over it; passed at the end of it between two rocks like Druidical "standing-stones," and, sending a flock of black-faced sheep bleating away through bracken, began to prowl round the grounds.

The ground very rough; no visible road: alders and willows huddled all one way by the continual sea-storm; and, as to the house, its structure was most intricate and quaint, the roofs of different breadths, spouts out of the straight, with an outhouse or lean-to here or there. But what struck him was the hoary age of the whole, the walls propped with beams which were themselves watery and soft with rot; and here or there a mass of masonry and beams had tumbled. Every window on both stories was boarded up; and, though Monk again and again

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applied his eyes to the boardings, he could spy no glimmer of light. All of a sudden a muffled, yet wild, howl wawled out of the house.

Monk had as yet no plan of action; yet upon action of some sort he was resolved; and hearing, as he now stood thinking how he was to act, a horse's neigh, he followed the sound, and came to an outhouse in an alder-spinney. This proved to be a stable, and there, against the door, stood a spade, a rake, and a crowbar.

Monk took the crowbar and returned to the house, where, after scrambling to the roof of a lean-to, he saw a crane projecting from the house, then found under it a shutter which was a slab of iron, and he set to work on this, the roar of the winds drowning the sounds of his fumbling. The roof, being slanting, and mossy, was slippery; but, lying along it, he managed presently to prise open the iron slab, which yielded with a pop, though, as it turned out, the wrench did not break the catch; and since the slab lacked a handle, when Monk had sprung into the apartment beyond, and when the wind slammed the slab, and the catch clicked, he realized that he was a prisoner.

Light though his leap was, it shook the house, which he felt shake throughout to each gust of the gale; and here, it was clear, was the home of old decay. As he stood there in a darkness that was complete, from somewhere far away there came to his ears a cry like the wail of one rived with pain; and when he struck a match, there, at his feet, kneeling with a face of fear, he saw a man, quite young, yet with white hair grown long, clad in the rags of a dressing-gown.

Having struck another match, Monk put his left hand on the lad's head, murmuring to him: "I am not going to hurt you; do I look, now, as if I would? Tell me who you are."

Nothing but a species of jabbering proceeded in answer out of the throat of the lad, who, opening his mouth wide, pointed inward to it.

"Ah!" . . . the lad had no tongue.

Monk kept on striking matches, examining that prostrate shape, examining the chamber.

He saw that there were two truckle-beds, from one of which the lad had apparently just risen, the other being "made": and at the foot of this other — chained to it — was a cash-box, which Monk was going to investigate when the lad held him back with a grip and gaze of warning — a gaze that all at once grew aghast at a sound of footsteps coming without. Quickly now Monk struck another match, hustled the lad into a large cupboard, with only one shelf, in a corner, locked the door upon him, kept the key; then, flying to the lad's bed, with that lightning knack of his so arranged the bed-clothes as to lend them an air of covering a slumberer. An instant later the key turned in a lock; there entered a very bulky man, bearing a candlestick with a tallow candle; and Monk, though he had purposely come to this house without a weapon, faced him.

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The man, dressed in a red shirt which bagged over his girdle, was evidently a servant, had an expression of dullness and grimness, a great fan-beard, and eyes nearly invisible beneath their lax lids, that resembled little draperies of skin. At sight of Monk his conduct was extraordinary. He simply dropped candlestick and candle, dashed to the cash-box, and, hugging it with both arms, began to bawl "Help!" But in one half-minute his mood of miserly affright changed to fury, and, bounding toward a stool, he caught and swung it to dash out Monk's brains; but Monk made a dodge as if to seize the cash-box, and the man, seeing this in the still-burning candlelight, bounded to intercept him; upon which Monk escaped out of the chamber.

Leaving the crowbar in a corner, and marking the spot in his mind, Monk darted onward, little knowing whither, through the most curious house which he had yet seen, where one chamber was higher or lower than the next by three or four steps, where nothing appeared quite straight, doors hung awry, floors lay aslant. He went butting into triangular rooms, antic nooks, whimsical corners, till, at last, seeing a blink of light ahead, he boldly moved toward it, opened a door, entered a room.

There hastened to meet him — a man; and both stood still, looking at each other.

The man — a powerful person of middle height — walked with a busy fling-out of the right leg, his left hand stuck in the pocket of a robe tied with a cord round the waist; he wore spectacles across his broad face, had a broad mouth, and an out-sticking beard, so hairy as to invade the fat of his cheeks.

At last he spoke, saying quite coolly: "What are you doing here?"

His speech was a species of rapid mutter, and even in the act of speaking, his tongue-tip was ever out, seeking for one end of his moustache to eat.

"Here to find a brother of mine," Monk answered.

"What name?"

"Never mind the name. The lad whose tongue you have cut out, Sir Saul Ingram."

Monk was standing with his palms pressed on a table, his back toward the one door, and the baronet, more remote from the door, was moving round toward it — a movement that Monk noticed, but made no attempt to stop. So now, with a sudden run, Ingram gained the door, closed it, locked it. He then stepped to a chest of drawers, got out of a drawer a revolver, turned upon his prisoner. At the same time there was a banging outside the door, and a mouth howling: "There is a mon in the house!"

"Yes, I know, go away," Ingram said to the door; and to Monk: "You are a fool. Woe to the conquered" — with the table between them.

"Going to shoot me?" asked Monk — "an unarmed and helpless man?"

"Fool," muttered Ingram; "what else than shoot you?"

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"I have help near; I defy you to shoot."

Ingram raised the weapon, finger on trigger.

All the house trembled with many a weary creak to the power of the storm, while some seconds passed, in which the baronet appeared to be enjoying a consciousness of power. The shot, however, was never fired: for there rang out a passionate shout — from outside the house, apparently — a cry in the night: "Arthur! expect us at two o'clock!": and it was the baronet who seemed shot — stepped backward, then rushed aimlessly to the door, aimlessly back again, in frank scare, realizing no doubt that, if Monk's presence in the house was known outside it, then Monk's death, and the manner of it, was a matter for reflection. But he was partially reassured by Monk himself, who said: "No, I have no help near; that shout came from *me*, and seemed to come from outside because I am the sort of man who can do such things. You couldn't shoot me, I think. Try again, and I have other ways of stopping you, some not so agreeable."

Ingram eyed him with a grim underlook, quite undecided now, no doubt, as Monk wished him to be, whether the cry had or had not come from outside; and he probably resolved to wait till "two," the hour mentioned by the voice.

At this point a rap sounded on the locked door, and when Ingram opened it, there slouched in the man in the red shirt whom Monk had encountered before, bearing dishes on both palms, and followed by a tall woman, white-faced, gaunt, her gown black, who bore on a tray a bottle, a plate, a tablecloth. The man took not the slightest notice of Monk, but the woman eyed him with a look of rancour. No one spoke. The woman spread the table, the man put on the dishes. But as she turned to go, the woman, holding up a finger, said to Ingram: "Saul, give heed! Danger this night!"

The baronet made no answer, locked the door after them, and sat to a repast of potatoes, boiled cod, black bread, whisky; and he set to eating with a certain earnestness, and to drinking.

After some minutes he glanced up at Monk, who stood regarding him with folded arms, and said: "Sit, if you like."

Monk sat by the table, watching the feast, watching the revolver on the table, watching the gulps of whisky. At last, yielding perhaps to the garrulous influence of the drink, Ingram suddenly said: "Foolish man! What is it all about?"

And Monk: "I found out that you were up to some mischief, and came to stop you."

"Mischief? Know what I am?"

"No, tell me."

"The only exact biologist in the world."

"Oh, come, the only one?"

"See those three books there? In manuscript. Secret of genesis of life in them."

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"Truly? And by what methods ——?"

"Only one way — human vivisection."

"By Jove!"

Something here new to Monk; and he gazed with something resembling reverence at that plump face, as Ingram drained yet a glass, saying: "The dumb fellow you saw — young parson from Cambridge — am driving mad for brain. Doctors say, you know, they can discover no morbid anatomy in mad brains. No morbid anatomy! Ha, God!"

Ingram grinned to himself at this.

"So how do you drive people mad?" Monk asked.

"Fear, torture, horror, other things; have snakes, a jaguar, a monster grouse with four legs; simply solitary confinement sometimes. Depends on diathesis of subject."

"Well, you are candid enough," from Monk: "how if friends are really coming to rescue me at two? I'll naturally repeat all this."

"No, you won't, friends or no friends. Suppose I wanted to hide you — alive — I could. Why, I have seventeen people here now, undergoing preparations, and you might search, you wouldn't find. Minds like mine are trained to ingenuity, eh?"

"I should call out, of course."

"You wouldn't. I could have you dumb in three minutes. But you won't be here to call out — going into a packing-case with gun-cotton and a time-fuse for first goods-train; thirty miles from Stratton Eastern scarcely a trace left of you."

"Even so, you won't escape the law," Monk remarked, "for one of my friends knows of the presence here of the dumb lad, who will be looked for, and undoubtedly found."

Ingram reflected, nodded, said: "You may be right there. I'd better examine his brain now instead of next week; and his body shall go with yours to the railway."

"But tell me one thing," Monk now said: "since science is your motive, how comes it that your name figures in insurance policies?"

Ingram at this glanced up angrily, stung in his honour, crying, "What! You know of that? And do you suppose that the motives of a man like me could be tainted in that way? Why, I live on sixpence a day! — except the whisky. Sometimes I do take out a policy on a patient, but not for myself! I have two misers in the house — Hubert and my sister — they get the money. That man Hubert — miserly — mad! Thinks I am for ever on the look-out to steal the money I have given! Sleeps with fellow without tongue and nobody dare approach room: once wanted to kill me — mad."

"I see," said Monk: "Whisky is golden, but silence is more so. Doesn't it occur to you, Ingram, that with all this knowledge that you have given me I can snuff you out in five or six different ways?"

The baronet took this coolly. As the rude repast ended, a clock struck midnight.

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"Hubert!" presently roared the baronet, at the same time clattering a hand-bell, and when Hubert came slouching in, said to him, "Look in the dissecting-room closet, and carry one of those three packing-cases to your room. Wilson and this man will have to go into it, and you have to take them to the station at five in the morning. Understand?"

Hubert grumbled something.

"And don't go holding matches and things over the packing-case, now," Ingram added with a grim smile: "gun-cotton in it."

Hubert grunted, but did not move.

"Well, why don't you go?" Ingram asked.

"Why must the box be e'en stowed in *my* room?" — from Hubert.

"Oh, go away, you, do what I tell you!" said the baronet. "Who wants to steal your daft money? I'm not even going to enter your room. Isn't that the only room with a crane to lower the packing-case?"

Hubert, reassured, grumbled something, and went out. And now Ingram at once began to make preparations for the operation on the brain, taking two instrument-cases from a bureau, examining sphygmograph, microtome, forceps, scalpels, trephine, one by one, over the lamp, and laying them out on a window-seat, the scalpels wrapped in chamois. The baronet had laid down the instruments on the window-seat, when a white face with malign eyes peeped in, saying: "Saul, I would have speech with you."

The baronet stalked to her, and, while they stood talking a little outside the door, Monk stole close and hearkened.

"Saul," the woman said, "it is not well this night, I'm doubting. I have heard your talk with yon callant ——"

"Well, what's the matter now, Elspeth?" — the baronet was impatient.

"Are you minded to make any more operations on Wilson to-night, Saul?" she asked: "no, don't do it, it is a long work, you will not have the time."

"I am busy — what is it you want with me?" — from the baronet.

"End Wilson at once, Saul," she answered, "and yon callant, too, and put them both into the box for the station: for I feel a fright on me. You know not what aid this man may ha' outside; and here is Hubert threeping that one of the snakes has escaped, and I near fainting with fright ——"

Monk stopped to listen to no more, flew lightly round the shelves, searching till he found a bottle marked "Phosphorus," which contained some waxy, semi-transparent sticks in water. From this he took out one of the sticks, wetting his fingers well, so that their warmth should not cause the phosphorus to flame; and now, running to the window-seat, he took one of the scalpels there out of its chamois wrapping, made the leather damp to keep it cold a little, and then, putting the stick of phosphorus with the scalpel, wrapped them up. He had put back the bottle in its place when the baronet came in again, stalked to the window, hurriedly put his tools into an outer pocket of his robe, phos-

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phorus and all, and called out "Hubert!"

"Look you," said Monk, now frowning balefully, "let me save you some trouble, sir. You are calling this Hubert, I think, to tell him to take Wilson to your operating table. Well, but Wilson is gone — has escaped ——"

Ingram turned white.

"*I* set him at liberty," Monk added.

At those words the baronet flew. To this moment the disappearance of Wilson had not been discovered, probably owing to Monk's life-like placing of the bed-clothes when he had locked him away in the cupboard. At any rate, so intense was the baronet's scare at this ugly news, that, in flying out, he even forgot to lock Monk in — only for one instant, though, for back he flew, transferred the key to the outside, turned it, then was off anew, making for Wilson's chamber — which was Hubert's, too; and he was just off when Hubert, in answer to his summons, came, rapped, turned the key, entered, and was looking round for the baronet, when Monk, bursting into laughter, said: "What, looking for the master? Gone out. Well, you can guess — called you to get you out of the way while he went to your room — in want of a little cash to-night to buy my silence. Take my advice: lie low — say nothing."

The man's face passed through all the expressions of disbelief, belief, rage, lunacy; and suddenly, casting up his arms, he fled; but after one moment's forgetfulness, he, too, darted back to the key, turned it, and was away again.

Monk, then, was still a prisoner; but he now no sooner found himself alone than he began to shout, in a perfect imitation of Ingram's voice: "Hi! Elspeth!", and when in a minute the baronet's sister turned the handle, then the key, peeped in, looking for her brother, Monk, bowing, said to her: "The baronet has just left the room, madam. I see that he is in a great hurry to make his experiment on that Wilson, and is now gone to get all ready; but, hurry as he may, I tell you that he will hardly have time. Look you, will you make a bargain with me?"

"Well?" asked Elspeth.

"Madam," said Monk, "I stand this night in peril; but so do you: and if I show you how to save yourself, will *you* save *me?* A bargain?"

"Ye-es," said the woman.

"Well, in one half-hour others from outside will be here — I know it — and as they have reason to believe that Wilson is here, the only hope for you really is to have Wilson out of the house in the packing-case before they come; and since the baronet is bent upon his experiment, your one chance is to end this Wilson with your own hands — this moment — as he lies a-bed, before the baronet can get him for the experiment: for the baronet has no use for the dead body, it is the living brain that he is after. So now I have told you the facts: will you save my life in return?"

"We must see," she answered, with her twitching eyes of craft — seeing

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fully the force of Monk's remarks, and at once, making up her mind, she turned to the bureau to unlock a drawer by one of the bundle of keys at her girdle, and to draw forth a horn-handled knife, her purpose, as Monk knew, being to spring first upon and stab *him*, before hurrying to the dumb lad's bed. But while she was still stooping over the bureau, Monk had caught up Ingram's water-jug, and, hiding it behind his back, had looked down at the floor, which he found to slant, like most of the floors: and, as the woman was raising herself to turn upon him, he hissed: "A snake!"

When she stared with panic where he pointed, her glance saw in the room's gloom a wiry form gliding over the floor toward her — a snake created by Monk, who, having heard her say that one of the baronet's snakes had escaped, had now, out of the water-bottle, poured an undulating rivulet over the floor. The woman was gone headlong, leaving the door open, Monk after her, tracking the sound of her footfalls, himself all unmarked, through the intricacies of the house, toward Wilson's room.

The situation at that moment in that room Monk declares that he knew with precision, as though he saw it. He had sent the baronet to find Wilson, and the miser, Hubert, to find the baronet: now, he was convinced that Ingram had a real fear of the miser's growls and furies, and he knew that no sooner would Ingram have discovered the absence of Wilson than he would hear the oncoming of the wrath of Hubert; upon which it was certain that the baronet, to avoid a scene, or something worse, would wish to secrete himself. But there was no hiding-place in that room, save two — the cupboard and the bed-clothes of Wilson's truckle-bed. The cupboard, containing Wilson, Monk had locked: so, Ingram, knowing that Hubert was still ignorant of Wilson's disappearance, would scuttle beneath Wilson's bed-clothes, and pretend to be Wilson asleep. And Monk had now prompted Elspeth to kill Wilson in his bed; provided she did which quickly, she would kill her brother.

Something more or less corresponding to these calculations must really have taken place. Hubert, on entering Wilson's room, must have struck a match, peered round, seen no baronet there, and now, perhaps, was about to go out again, when he must have heard footsteps — Elspeth coming to "end" Wilson; on which the miser's suspicions must at once have leapt up afresh, and he must have crouched somewhere in the dark to watch what would take place. Elspeth then went in, Monk by that time being close behind her, though, before he could reach the door, she had shut and secured it; and he stood listening outside. And now the woman, moving no doubt on hands and knees, steel in hand in the rayless dark, crawled for the bed on which lay her brother, for suddenly — short, but raucous — Monk heard the outburst of a shout.

At this outcry of the baronet, Hu-

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bert must have addressed Elspeth: for presently Monk heard her explaining her motive for disposing at once of the dumb lad; then a match was struck within; but, as they had no candle, and the baronet's face must have been covered, he was not apparently recognised; there followed a noise of shuffling feet when the body was being raised and placed in the packing-case waiting there to receive Wilson; and as the garment worn by Wilson was of the same sort as Ingram's, no suspicion of the truth could have occurred to the criminals, who would strike no matches over the gun-cotton in that box. Monk heard the drop of the lid over the deposited body, and the woman's question: "Has it a lock?"

And now he knew that there was need for haste. In the box was gun-cotton, and in the baronet's pocket phosphorus, for Monk, who could be ruthless, had doomed all the three. That phosphorus must quickly fire at the warmth of a body still warm packed into a closed box, the moistened chamois round it now dry or drying. Now, therefore, Monk darted to the spot where he had deposited the crowbar, then back to the room, outside which, at about the spot where the cupboard which contained Wilson stood, he began to dig at the boarding, Elspeth and Hubert within hearkening in a paralysis of awe apparently to those strokes of the crowbar while on he toiled in the momentary expectancy of death; till at last the oak was crackling, a plank splintered, another, and an opening was there. Now Monk felt the contact of chilly flesh, dragged the lad out, tossed the meagre form over his shoulders, and, as though the fiend was after him, went flying, with many a blind stumble and fumble; till, spying a gleam like moonshine through a crack, he again and again drove his back against some boarding, tumbled outward, and down, fifteen feet, and was rolling downhill in bracken.

Then, catching up Wilson afresh, Monk made paces from the house, but had hardly run thirty yards when behind him a rumpus like the bursting of some tremendous drum had the earth atremble, and glancing backward, he saw a swarm of débris flying, like startled grouse in the midst of a spout of glare. Then followed three more brisk bangs: and the explosion, which was local to Wilson's room, was over. But some instinct of general ruin held Monk rooted where he stood during two minutes of dreadful expectation; at the end of which, a ponderous cake of masonry tumbled outward in a smoke of dust, and from the interior there pealed forth, joined in one choir, a shriek of voices: and in some moments the whole hotch-potch of the house nodded, shouted, and rushed to ruin.

Day was breaking when Monk reached Stratton Eastern with his dumb friend, and I saw him again three days later.

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The reaction of most readers to their first O'Malley story is usually something like this: Why, it's so simple I could write it myself! True, Mr. MacHarg rarely uses a long or unfamiliar word — his O'Malley tales are almost object lessons in Basic English; and the sentence structure is simplicity itself. But don't be deceived: the easier it is to read a story, the harder the story is to write, and many a professional author would give his left eye to write with really polished simplicity.

What, then, makes the O'Malley stories grow on you? What do you see in the second half-dozen stories that you somehow failed to see in the first half-dozen? What makes the affairs of O'Malley get under your skin? The answer is obvious once it hits you: the simple, natural, completely unaffected style is as close an approach to true realism as is possible in this genre — truer realism in many respects than the fast and furious hard-boileders produce. And true realism sinks in, it gets inside of you.

Don't make any mistake about the O'Malley shorts: they're not soft. They're tough and terse and muscular, and they focus a policeman's lot with the photographic clarity of a literary candid-camera.

BROADWAY MURDER

by WILLIAM MacHARG

"We got a Broadway killing," O'Malley said. "You either solve these night-people cases right away or you have a tough time cracking 'em. This looks to be a easy one. A guy that called himself Norden got bumped off in a car on East River Drive. Cops knew him to be a member of a mob that hung out around hotels and cafés and got money out of strangers — con guys. He had been shot and the gun was in the car. Witnesses had seen him get in the car that night with someone that answered the description of a guy from Rochester named Dennin. So they pinched Dennin."

"How did they find him?" I asked.

"Cops knew where he was. They just went to his hotel and picked him up. It turned out the gun was Dennin's, so it looks like there ain't nothing to the case, but I got orders I'm to check on it."

O'Malley had a record of the arrest. It said Dennin was twenty-six years old. He was a buyer of sports goods for a department store in Rochester and came frequently to New York. We went to see him. They had him at headquarters.

"He has got visitors," a desk officer informed us.

"Yeah. Who?"

"They claim they're his parents."

We went in anyway. I thought

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Dennin was good-looking. An elderly man and sweet-faced woman were talking with him. There was a girl about twenty years old there too. Her name was Miss Ende. They had traveling bags that showed they had come from Rochester and hadn't yet gone to a hotel, and the women were crying.

"I guess you been telling these people how it come about that you knocked that guy off," O'Malley said to Dennin.

"He didn't do it!" Mrs. Dennin declared.

"Lady, he'd say that anyway."

"No," Dennin said nervously, "I didn't do it. I just have been foolish. I met that man at my hotel. He didn't call himself Norden; he called himself Bufort. We got acquainted and went around several evenings together. He said he was a big businessman, and he kept talking about some stock he had that belonged to a woman who wanted to sell it but didn't want her husband to know, and he was afraid if he sold it through a broker her husband would find out. It was stock in a company I knew the name of and knew was all right. He said the woman would take a good deal less than it was worth if she was sure no one would know. I had three thousand dollars I'd saved up because I was expecting to get married."

"Yeah? To this lady here?"

"Yes," the girl said.

"So what?"

"Well, I bought the stock. When I got back to Rochester I showed it to a banker and he said the company had been reorganized and this was the old stock and it wasn't worth anything. So I complained to the New York police and they said that kind of man went by a lot of different names and they couldn't recognize him from my description. This time when I came to New York I decided to look for the man myself."

"So you came packing a gun."

"Yes; I brought a revolver, but I didn't intend to shoot anybody. The police hadn't found out anything, so I went around looking for him. I went around several evenings to all the places I'd been with him and to a lot of other places. Last night I saw him. He came out of a restaurant and got into a car and I was right behind him and got into the car with him. I told him the stock was no good and I wanted my money back and he kept arguing that the stock was all right. It was after midnight and we had got to the East Side and I didn't see any people around. So then I took out the gun. I told him he didn't know what kind of person he was dealing with and I was going to get my money back.

"Of course I didn't have any intention of shooting him. Well, he probably realized that, because he grabbed the gun away from me and made me get out of the car. I couldn't see any policeman and I was kind of ashamed about it. I hadn't learned any more about the man than I'd already told the police, and I hadn't got the number of the car, and I decided I'd wait till morning and then

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tell it to the police officer I'd talked with before. In the morning two detectives came to the hotel and arrested me and when I tried to tell them how it was they laughed at me."

"You believe that guy's story?" O'Malley asked me when we had got outside.

"No," I said. "I'm sorry. If it were the way he tells it, he would have gone straight to the police. Going back to his hotel convicts him. His story may be true up to the point where Norden tried to grab the gun, but I can't believe, when that happened, Dennin didn't pull the trigger."

"Sure. Everybody thinks that. Well, now, it's funny. A cop ain't supposed to believe nobody and I don't believe as much as other cops. We got all a lawyer needs to prove a murder case — motive and opportunity. Still, I believe the kid, but I guess I am the only guy that will. It might be there's something wrong with me. I thought this one was a easy case, but now it turns into a hard one. Well, we'll see what we can do with it."

We saw the mobsters. They had them at the station house — a man who called himself Craig and another named Pailey and another named Press. They weren't under arrest, but had been brought in for questioning. They all were barbered and manicured and carefully dressed and police questioning didn't bother them — they acted as if they might have been through it before.

"How was this about this fellow Norden?" O'Malley asked them.

"Well, he got shot."

"Gee, you don't tell me! Who done it?"

"It was a piece of Norden's private business. We had nothing to do with it."

We saw the car. There was no doubt Norden had been killed in it. There was plenty of blood.

"Anything but the gun in this bus?" O'Malley asked the cop that showed it to us.

"They found some fingerprints — Norden's and the fellow's from Rochester. A lady was in the car sometime. They found her fingerprints too."

"What lady?"

"We got nothing on that. She hasn't got a police record."

We saw the dead man. He was big and fine-looking, which must have helped in his business. He had been expensively dressed. Only ordinary things were in his pockets. One was a book of matches. The match book said, "Thoroughbred Grill. Mike is Your Friend."

"Who's Mike?" I asked O'Malley.

"I'd figure he runs that grill. He would be the kind of friend people have on Broadway. That means it don't mean nothing. I guess we got to see what reports been turned in on this case."

We read the reports. They had them at homicide headquarters.

"Well," O'Malley said, "this case is this way: There weren't any fingerprints on that gun — we don't find

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'em sometimes even if they ain't been wiped off. We know it's the right gun because laboratory cops fired bullets from it and checked up the markings on 'em with the bullet that killed Norden. The car didn't belong to Norden; the license plates show it was registered to a lady named Miss Verney. That ain't nothing remarkable because mobsters don't like to use a car that's registered in their name, so pretty often they register 'em in the name of some lady friend.

"Them police reports say Miss Verney is a friend of that guy Press. Maybe all of them mobsters used that car. Some lady left her fingerprints in the bus, but they ain't Miss Verney's because she had been in trouble one time and cops have her fingerprints and the two don't match. We don't know whose, and if we did it probably wouldn't get us anywhere, because the prints might have been made any time and wouldn't have nothing to do with the murder. Dennin didn't say nothing about a lady. Still, it sticks in my head there are women in this business somewhere."

"What are you going to do?"

"Why, I got no program. If women were in this, they would be Broadway ladies. It's harder to get information out of them than out of men, and I ain't had the experience I need with that kind of people. I'm like a babe in the woods when I'm on that thoroughfare."

"Some babe!" I said, "and some woods!"

Next day I lost track of O'Malley. I called up several precinct stations and a lot of other places and I went looking for him wherever I thought that he might be. I couldn't learn anything. He couldn't be taking a vacation or he would have told me. In about a week, after the theater, I was walking on Broadway and I saw a sign that said "Thoroughbred Grill," so I went in to see what the place was like. A stuffed race horse was just inside the door and there were pictures of horses all over the walls and a big man, who must have been Mike, was walking around among the tables greeting the diners. I ordered chili con carne. I didn't look at the waiter.

"If you eat much of that stuff," the waiter said, "you won't have no stomach left."

The waiter was O'Malley.

"Have you been learning anything?" I asked.

"I learned a waiter makes better money than a cop."

It was a pretty big place and was well filled with men and women and most of the women were young. I wondered if one of them was Miss Verney. There was a redhead at the next table that I thought might be she, and an exceedingly pretty blonde at another table, and a black-haired girl at still another. I watched O'Malley, but I didn't find out anything. He acted just like any other waiter.

He phoned me next morning:

"Listen! Something might happen at headquarters this afternoon."

I went to headquarters. They had about a dozen women there and an

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nspector was questioning them. The redhead and the blonde and the black-haired girl were there and others I hadn't seen. One was a very pretty woman who wore a lot of jewelry. She had on a mink coat. I was surprised because they were questioning the women in a group instead of separately, as the police usually do. The inspector was asking them only routine questions: Had they known Norden? Did they know anything about the murder? Then he questioned the woman in the mink coat.

"Did you know Norden?"

"I'd met him."

"How about Press and Craig?"

"I'd met them. I never had much to do with them. I didn't want to know them but they came to my apartment sometimes."

"You didn't want to know them but they came to your apartment? How was that?"

"Do I have to answer?"

"No, lady," O'Malley told her, "but if you don't answer we'll lock you up."

"Well, I couldn't help receiving them because Mr. Pailey brought them."

"Does that mean that Pailey was paying the rent of your apartment?"

"He was."

"Did he buy you those rings?"

"He did."

"How about the coat?"

"Yes."

"Did you ever hear any of them say anything about this murder?"

"I didn't."

"Well, O'Malley," I whispered, "you're not getting much out of these women."

"Boy, not a thing!"

I couldn't find O'Malley after the questioning, so I left. Next morning's newspaper said Pailey had been arrested for the murder. I found O'Malley. I came at a bad time because Mr. and Mrs. Dennin were with him and his face was red because Mrs. Dennin had just kissed him.

"Tell me about this," I demanded.

"Why, go read your newspaper! Say, let's get out of here! The newspaper's got how it was. Pailey killed Norden because Norden had been two-timing the other members of the mob. Pailey and Press and Craig had been suspicious quite a while that Norden was holding money out on them, and they told him if they found out he was they'd knock him off.

"The night Norden got killed he was on his way to meet Pailey and a lady named Eva Rand at the Rand dame's apartment. She is that pretty black-haired kid you seen when we was questioning them women at headquarters. Well, everything in the car happened the way Dennin told it. After Norden had took the gun away from Dennin he went and picked up Pailey and the Eva dame like he had intended, because they were going to an all-night joint out on Long Island, and they asked him what made him late. Norden was all cocky and proud of himself for the way he had got rid of Dennin and he couldn't

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resist telling 'em about it, and he showed 'em the gun. Well, he told too much. Pailey guessed the trouble had been about money Norden had got from Dennin that he hadn't split with the mob, and the way Norden acted made him sure of it. Then Pailey seen how events had fixed themselves up so that he could knock Norden off without danger to himself. Here was a gun that belonged to somebody else, and nobody had seen Pailey and Miss Rand get into the car.

"Pailey and the girl was in the back seat and Norden was driving. When they got to a place where there was nobody around he asked to look at the gun. After he'd shot Norden, Miss Rand got out of the car and Pailey drove it to the East Side where Norden had had his trouble with Dennin. He wiped his fingerprints off the gun and put the gun in the car. He didn't do nothing to the front part of the car where Dennin and Norden had been, but he wiped off everything in the back seat that him or Miss Rand had touched. It was just luck he missed one fingerprint. Miss Rand had opened a window and she touched the glass. Pailey didn't think to raise the window again and wipe it off."

"All right!" I said. "But there wasn't any indication of Pailey or anybody except Dennin in the case, unless you held out a lot of information on me."

"No; you seen all that was done. This was a case where we didn't have much to start from. A cop that has what looks like nothing just has to start from what he has. So I figured I'd work from the fingerprint, and if it didn't lead nowhere I might turn up something else while I was doing it. I had no idea who the lady might be, because it was that Miss Verney's car and all them mobsters used it, and they knew too many ladies. I hadn't no doubt she was some Broadway lady and I got what information I could about what dames they went with, but there were a lot of 'em and a cop can't go round fingerprinting ladies without they're willing. So the idea come to me I'd be a waiter. A waiter hears a lot."

"I saw you being a waiter," I said, "but I saw nothing else."

"You're pretty dumb! You didn't notice what I was doing with the glasses? Whenever I waited on some lady I thought might be the one, I picked up the glass she had been using without touching it outside, and I saved it and sent it to the bureau of identification. If I could find out her name I put a piece of paper in the glass with the name on it, and if I couldn't get her name I wrote a description of her on the paper. I sent over a hundred glasses to them identification cops before they found one that had the same fingerprints on it that was in the car, and them prints belonged to that Eva Rand, and I found out that she was Pailey's woman.

"Well, what to do then? Maybe she didn't know anything about the murder, but it was necessary to find out if she did. I figured it wouldn't

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o no good to question her. Mobsters ell their women more than they tell nybody else, but whatever guy said woman can't keep a secret didn't now mobsters' ladies.

"Well, the best reason a lady tells omething is because she is sore at a uy and wants to get square with im, and the thing that makes dames ke that Rand kid sorest of all is to ind out that her guy has been spend- ng more money on some other woman han he does on her.

"So then I thought up that game ou seen us work at headquarters. We ot Eva Rand and about a dozen ther women in for questioning, and ne of 'em was a dame in a mink coat hat none of the rest of 'em knew. She was a cop. She testified Pailey paid her rent and had bought her her jewelry and her coat. I was waiting for the Rand kid after the questioning, and when she come out she was so sore she couldn't hardly speak. To get square with Pailey she blew up and told me everything, and she knew more than I had even hoped. She told how this case was and I got her to put it down in writing, and now we have her as a eyewitness that she seen Pailey knock Norden off."

"A fine piece of work!" I declared.

"Sure. Well, it might change me from being a cop into being a waiter. If a guy slips a cop a ten-dollar bill they call it a bribe, but a waiter just takes it and says, 'Thank you.'"

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BEGINNING A NEW SERIES

The name of Jack Moffitt may seem strangely familiar to you. Perhaps you'll recall Mr. Moffitt as the collaborator with Sinclair Lewis on the Federal Theatre dramatization of Mr. Lewis's IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE. *More likely you'll remember seeing the name of Jack Moffitt on the screen. As a Hollywood scenario writer, he has worked on screenplays for Bing Crosby, Hedy Lamarr, Humphrey Bogart, Fred MacMurray, Dorothy Lamour, Bob Burns, and other Paramount and Warner Brothers stars.*

Well, Jack Moffitt has come through with one of the most engaging literary ideas ever submitted to your astonished Editor. He has taken one of the greatest short stories of all time, Guy de Maupassant's "The Necklace," and written a sequel to it — a criminous sequel!

The idea of one author writing an afterpiece to another author's story is not new to literature. This unusual type of delayed collaboration has occurred quite often. For example, two of Robert Louis Stevenson's famous books have inspired sequels: Arthur D. Howden Smith's ALAN BRECK AGAIN *is a full-length postscript to Stevenson's* KIDNAPPED; *and H. A. Calahan's* BACK TO TREASURE ISLAND *is exactly what the title says. Two Mark Twain masterpieces have had excellent sequels:* TOM SAWYER GROWS UP *and* MORE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN, *both written by Clement Wood. H. Bedford Jones has invented several sequels to Alexandre Dumas's* THE THREE MUSKETEERS, *and if memory serves, Tiffany Thayer has also contrived a full-length epilogue to the same story.*

In the field of the detective-crime novel there have also been official and unofficial continuations. Barry Perowne has carried on the Raffles legend by writing many successors to the original E. W. Hornung tales. And Fortuné du Boisgobey, one of the "forgotten" early French masters, wrote a sequel to the Gaboriau series which he called THE OLD AGE OF MONSIEUR LECOQ.

But all these examples, you will note, are novels or novelettes. To the best of your Editor's memory, no one has followed up a short story with another short story. So, while Mr. Moffitt's basic conception is in the accepted tradition of the past, he has added the refreshing novelty of sequel-by-short-story. And so refreshing do we find Mr. Moffitt's approach that we have asked him to make his "The Necklace" the first of a series of sequels. It will be interesting to see what Mr. Moffitt can do to solve the

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sixty-two-year-old dilemma in Frank R. Stockton's "The Lady, or the Tiger?" Can Mr. Moffitt also devise a really satisfying explanation to the fifty-year-old riddle in Cleveland Moffett's "The Mysterious Card"?

In the meantime whet your appetite for coming continuations by enjoying the rich and rewarding experience of "finishing" de Maupassant's classic tale of "The Necklace."

THE NECKLACE

(A Sequel to de Maupassant's *The Necklace*)

by JACK MOFFITT

WOMEN live in a secret world. They will share their beds much more readily than their thoughts. A husband may know every contour of his wife's body and still be ignorant of what goes on in her mind. Sometimes a great emotional climax breaks down this barricade and a man who has lived with the most commonplace of females finds himself shocked as he looks across the spiritual wreckage at things that are both terrifying and inspired.

I am thinking of the case of Mathilde Loisel. Her story has waited a century to be told. De Maupassant told half of it in his little masterpiece called *The Necklace*. But there was a second half that stemmed from the first.

It is this that I propose to tell you. I found the story among the memoirs of a long dead priest. He had been Madame Loisel's confessor — and it is certain that he enjoyed the confidence of the Paris police officers who were assigned to the Loisel case. By means of a curious collaboration, in which they considered both criminal and spiritual clues, they seem to have arrived at a solution which had its overtones of disconcerting human truth.

As you undoubtedly remember, de Maupassant tells of a pretty and vain young woman, Madame Loisel, who borrowed a diamond necklace to wear to a ball. On the way home, she lost it. The author goes on to explain how she returned a duplicate of the lost piece of jewelry and to describe the miserable ten years of poverty and drudgery by which she and her husband, a small-salaried clerk, managed to pay for it. Then, after the struggle was over, Madame Loisel saw the woman from whom she had borrowed the necklace walking in the Champs Élysées on a Sunday afternoon. Her name was Madame Jeanne Forestier and, except for the child by her side, the years had brought few changes to this prosperous matron. The unfortunate Madame Loisel went up to her.

De Maupassant brings his narrative to its dénouement as his heroine says:

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"Good day, Jeanne."

The other, astonished to be so familiarly accosted by this plain good wife, did not recognize her at all and stammered: "But, madame! — I do not know — you must have made a mistake."

"No. I am Mathilde Loisel."

Her friend gave a cry. "Oh, my poor Mathilde! How you have changed."

"Yes, I have had a pretty hard life since I last saw you, days wretched enough. And that because of you."

"Of me! How so?"

"Do you remember that necklace of diamonds you let me wear at the ministerial ball?"

"Yes. Well?"

"Well, I lost it."

"What do you mean? You brought it back."

"I brought you back another just like it. And we have been ten years paying for it. You can understand that it was not very easy for us, for us who had nothing. At last it is over, and I am very glad."

Madame Forestier had stopped.

"You say that you bought a necklace of diamonds to replace mine?"

"Yes. You never noticed them! They were very similar."

Madame Forestier, deeply agitated, took both her hands.

"Oh, my poor Mathilde! Why, my necklace was paste! It was worth at the most five hundred francs."

That is where de Maupassant ends his narrative. But life cannot conclude with a paragraph. Ten minutes after the tragic revelation, Madame Forestier had called her carriage and the horses were drawing them smartly through the shaded elegance of the Champs Élysées. Jeanne was crying. She kept exclaiming piteously over the tragedy of Mathilde's wasted ten years.

Mathilde said nothing. She sat with her big hands limp in her lap and her eyes expressionless.

What could this flighty woman with her ostrich feathers and her smell of mignonette know of toil and poverty? Her words lacked meaning.

Jeanne's child sat silently in a corner of the carriage. Her little feet did not touch the floor. Her soft eyes regarded Mathilde with uncomprehending awe; as though she were rendering homage to the heroine of some grown-up play — a play she found impressive but whose plot she did not understand.

Without realizing it, Mathilde responded to the look of the child. It gave her a certain pleasure. She had not been the center of admiring attention for such a long time. Not since the night of the ministerial ball — when her husband had dozed, with other unimportant guests, in an anteroom while she danced until four in the morning with fashionable young men.

When they reached the home of the Forestiers, this sense of pleasure increased. Madame Forestier was so full of what had happened that she started blurting out the story to the

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old man-servant who opened the door. She told more of it to the maid as she took their wraps. Both servants followed them up the stairs.

Jeanne's husband was dozing in a worn silk chair, as they entered the boudoir sitting room. He removed a silk handkerchief from his face and arose to blink at his wife as she crossed to the wardrobe with a rustle of flounces and opened the mirrored door. He yawned as though expecting neither his wife's chatter nor her guest to be very interesting. Mathilde felt herself a nobody in his presence. A high bald brow and a magnificent yellow beard gave him a Jovian appearance. The newspapers sometimes mentioned him as one of the court physicians.

He listened owlishly as Madame Forestier brought out her jewel box and unlocked it. Mathilde did not see the pearls which she had been tempted to borrow on that momentous visit ten years before. But some new trinkets had been added and the Venetian cross of intricate workmanship still was there. It now occurred to Mathilde to wonder if these treasures were artificial, too.

But such doubts were forgotten when Madame Forestier reached into the bottom of her coffer and brought out the black satin necklace case. It was worn. Its stitches were broken and from beneath the ruined fabric, a soiled white showed through — like sickly flesh within a ruined stocking. It was a miserable container for a fortune. Mathilde found herself choking with disappointment.

But her breath came quicker and her heart pounded noisily when Madame Forestier snapped the catch and the frayed lid sprang back, revealing the glittering necklace.

How bright they were! How dazzling! Thirty-six thousand francs' worth of brilliant luxury. How could the Forestiers ever have mistaken them for imitations? How pure and stainless they were! Unsmirched by the ten years of filth and poverty that had paid for them.

Mathilde held her breath like a stalking animal. She scarcely dared look at her host and hostess. She must not communicate her anxiety. This was the critical moment.

Would the necklace be returned to her? If the Forestiers refused to surrender it, how could she prove it was hers? Ten years of haggling economy had left her suspicious of everyone. These people were supposed to be rich, but the threadbare upholstery of their fashionable furniture was in a suspicious contrast to their carriage and their clothing. They might be keeping up appearances. Anyway, no one was ever too rich to stop loving money. In her ten years of poverty, Mathilde had yet to meet a generous landlord or an open-handed shopkeeper. No one gave anything away.

Of course Mathilde now had witnesses. When Jeanne had chattered, like a fool, in front of the servants, it had seemed to be too good to be true. Yet servants are at the mercy of their masters. They can be bribed

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or intimidated. And, if their masters are politically prominent, the police are willing to dismiss their testimony as malicious tale-bearing. Most of Dr. Forestier's patients had positions in the government.

Mathilde glanced at him from the corners of wary eyes. He was eyeing the necklace as though he never had seen it before. One large pink hand clutched his yellow beard — paralyzed in the midst of a stately gesture. He seemed both thinking and listening, making a befuddled effort to force the sleep from his eyes. He wheezed. His whole being appeared to be struggling with some idea too startling to be readily absorbed.

Then his wife laughed and placed the jewel case in Mathilde's hands.

"This now belongs to you, my dear."

Mathilde couldn't smile. She wasn't sure yet. It had been too easy. She turned her full shrewd look on the woman's husband.

He failed to meet her eyes. His gaze was fixed enigmatically on the servants who loitered breathlessly by the door. For this domestic drama, they were an avid audience.

Benevolent wrinkles appeared at the corners of Dr. Forestier's eyes. A smile bloomed in the depths of the yellow beard.

"Of course the necklace belongs to you, Madame Loisel," he said. "There can be no question about it."

Ten years before, when her imagination glamorized such gentle folk, she would have taken his graciousness for granted. But now she found it un natural. She heard herself sobbin most unpleasantly and she wishe that she could stop. She wanted t take this treasure of hers and run ou of the house.

It was hers. She wanted to be alon with it.

But she was afraid.

After ten years, Mathilde's husban still was an unimportant little clerk He had achieved three promotion during the interval of struggle, eac with its infinitesimal salary increas His insignificance was, perhaps, fo tunate. Had he been more importan he never would have survived th shifting tides of politics at the Min istry of Public Instruction where h was employed.

As it was, he had become a respecte fixture in that gray world of copyis wherein distinction is won by th mastery of petty routine and whe valor consists of a patient and un complaining ability to hang on.

And he was not unhappy. On th contrary, he felt a tremendous sens of accomplishment over having, se eral months before, repaid the las loan necessitated by the necklac catastrophe — down to the final frac tion of compound interest. He re garded himself as a man of ampl proven honor. And he looked bac on the enormity of his debt with th same pride which misers reserve fo their savings.

At first this triumph was accom panied by a sort of purposeless be

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vilderment. During the years of unemitting industry, he had lost all bility to enjoy leisure. Indeed, his bleak surroundings made work a blessng which permitted squalor to be gnored.

So Monsieur Loisel set for himself new ambition. If he and his good vife continued to work and economize hey might, within the not too distant uture, return to such an attractive partment as they, during their early vedded years, had occupied in the Rue des Martyrs. Everything, or nearly everything, might be as it once vas.

And so, on that fateful Sunday ıfternoon, he was alone in his garret, ɔent over the rickety table, still intent ɔn making extra money by copying nanuscripts for five sous a page — ınd smiling at his work.

He was aroused from his happy nusings by the soup kettle.' After simmering all afternoon, it had suddenly come to a boil. Sniffing the ıppetizing smell of meat and vegeables, Monsieur Loisel put down his ɔen and shuffled to the stove. It was wonderful to have meat twice a week ıow. Without waiting for his wife to come home, Monsieur Loisel popped ı tiny bit of beef into his mouth and felt a delightful guilt. He smacked his lips. When Mathilde had something to work with, she was an excellent cook.

But the soup needed a little more salt. Or perhaps it didn't. He wouldn't want to ruin it. Mathilde should be home now to decide such questions. An annoyed uneasiness took possession of him as he looked out the window, and realized that it was late. It was well past the dinner hour. Half the chimneys had stopped smoking as householders let their kitchen fires go out. Monsieur Loisel had been uncomplaining over a ten-year interruption of his life. But he wanted his dinner on time.

He polished his spectacles and peered down at the figures on the pavement. As they moved in and out through the patches of street light they looked like grotesque foreshortened toys. He could distinguish no one from this height. Hurrying to the alcove, he kicked off his carpet slippers and fumbled for his gaiters. He must go out and look for her. Mathilde was long overdue.

He was beginning to worry now. He remembered newspaper stories of robbers and footpads; ruffians who leapt from alleyways and stole women's rings by slashing off their fingers. Monsieur Loisel shuddered. Mathilde had devoured such stories. The women, she maintained, were more to blame than the criminals. Was not their vanity a constant temptation to violence as they walked abroad displaying their useless jewels?

Monsieur Loisel fumbled for the buttons of his waistcoat. He knew his fears were foolish. The newspapers made one's imagination too vivid. What was there about his wife clumping homeward on ungainly shoes to arouse the cupidity of a footpad?

Then why did he keep seeing the

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leaping figure, the menacing hands, and hearing the running footsteps?

And why, upon the moist and dimly shining cobblestones, did he keep seeing Mathilde sprawled like a broken jumping jack with her limbs at crazy angles? Could this be the end of the bride who had come to him so lovely? He remembered her cool slenderness when he first knew her. Her romantic imaginings and her dainty embarrassments when, as bride and groom, they first had shared their awkward passion. What if she had been vain and frivolous? Life had been hard to her. She was a creature too beautiful to have been born into a world of clerks.

Filled with an unreasoning sadness, he blew out the candle and went through the door toward the stairs. Keeping close to the rickety banister, he felt his way down to the fourth floor landing. The stairs were cluttered with refuse. Since a month ago when he made Mathilde give up her job as janitress, the place had been a disgrace.

Tonight one of the tenants had taken the trouble to light the lamp on the fourth floor. By its faint flicker, he suddenly saw the angular figure of Madame Loisel plodding toward him up the stairs.

"Mathilde!"

She looked up at him and seemed surprised. Both surprised and resentful. She glared at him as she clutched her old cracked patent leather pocketbook to her bosom with both hands. Two small parcels were tucked beneath her elbows.

"Where have you been?" Anxiety made his voice irritable.

She stared at him as though trying to think of an answer.

He took a step toward her and asked, "Is anything wrong?"

"No — no — can't a woman rest in the park without being cross-examined? Is it a sin to enjoy the sunshine? You'd try the patience of a saint!"

"I was worried." He tried to kiss her but she pushed past him.

"No, no! Not here on the public stairway! Stop acting the fool!"

"Can I help you?" He reached for the parcels. "What did you buy?"

"Nothing that concerns you — can't a woman have any privacy . . . ! Let them alone."

But he persisted and, as she jerked away from him, one of the parcels crashed from her arms.

"Now see what you've done!"

Like an angry spirit, she vanished into the gloom of the upper stairs.

Hoping to soothe her, he stooped to retrieve the parcel. It was wrapped in colored paper and tied with fancy two-colored string such as was used by the fashionable chemists and hairdressers. He could see that it had contained a bottle of expensive cold cream. The paper wrappings were cut by the broken glass and a film of fragrant grease was oozing over the stairs.

Monsieur Loisel straightened up. The parcel was ruined beyond salvage. He trudged thoughtfully up the stairs.

What was happening to Mathilde?

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That jar of ointment must have cost all of her week's shopping money. It was her first extravagance since the night she lost the necklace. The night on which she had disdained the public omnibus and had insisted upon going to the ball in a cab.

When he re-entered the garret, he saw her other parcel on the table, but she had retired behind the alcove curtains. And he knew better than to follow her.

He crossed the room and lifted the lid on the soup kettle. He sniffed and reached for the wooden spoon.

"Don't be too long," he said, "the good soup is getting cold."

"The good soup!" Behind the flimsy curtains, Mathilde remembered ironically how that phrase of his had plagued her. Even when they were first married. It was so ambitionless. It still irritated her. He accepted the commonplace. He had no knack for elegance. He was a man for whom wealth could do no good.

Mathilde took off her cape and bonnet. She fumbled clumsily with the knots, trying to untie them with one hand. With the other she clutched the pocketbook.

Not once, since the Forestiers handed her the necklace, had she permitted it to leave her hands. She had clutched it during Jeanne's sentimental babble and the undisciplined congratulations of the servants. Dr. Forestier had offered to see her home in his carriage, but she had refused. She had scarcely been able to restrain her impatience when he had insisted upon presenting her with a bottle of vintage wine from the Forestiers' own table — or to wait while he had rushed off to see that it was properly wrapped.

"Take this," he said, "and promise us that you will drink it with your husband tonight. Soon Jeanne and I will visit you to help celebrate your happiness. But tonight should be for you two alone. Have you given Jeanne your address?"

Mathilde made a hasty promise and muttered her humble address. Then, as they smiled at her and patted her arms affectionately, she finally succeeded in getting down the stairs and out the door.

She wanted to be alone with her treasure. Without thinking of where she was going, moving like a somnambulist through the occasional cross-currents of traffic, she walked heedlessly up one street and down the other, rejoicing in the knowledge that she was wealthy — and that wealth can make one free.

It was some time before she realized that she had retraced her steps to the Champs Élysées — to a spot near where she had met Jeanne.

She sat down on a bench. Then moved to another — nearer to a gendarme and placed closer to a lamppost, for daylight was beginning to fade. A few hours ago she had entered the park a drudge, almost a pauper. Now she was a rich woman. It was time to take inventory.

She and her husband paid thirty-six thousand francs for the necklace

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ten years ago. It should be worth more now. All Paris knew the current government was shaky. For some weeks the editorial writers had been denouncing the increasing tendency of the rich to convert their wealth into movable assets. Those close to the court of Louis Philippe were getting ready to run. And they were reluctant to leave empty-handed. The gazettes said jewelers were doing a rushing business. Today the necklace might bring fifty or sixty thousand francs.

All her life Mathilde had wanted to be rich. She had been born poor and beautiful, a maddening combination. She might have made a wonderful match had her father been able to provide her with a dowry. What a dowry sixty thousand francs would have been!

Mathilde sat under the street light, holding the pocketbook that contained the necklace, and permitted herself to day dream.

She was rich now. The future swung dazzlingly before her, like the bright pendant that hung from the necklace, outshining the stones that supported it. She was only thirty-two years old. The life before her would be so brilliant that it would totally eclipse the feeble sparkle of all previous hopes and years.

A laugh cut in on her reverie and in its harshness it seemed to be the mockery of her own conscience. She had no reason to feel triumphant over a dowry. She was irrevocably married to a little clerk. A pettyfoggling nonentity. And her beauty was gone.

Mathilde was self-centered enough to be a realist. She knew her skin had coarsened and her voice had become strident. She had neither looks nor charm. It was too late now.

The laugh was repeated and she turned to see where it came from. A horse-faced woman was making her way from one of the sidewalk restaurants followed by a swarm of stylish young men. She had prominent discolored teeth and her hair was inaccurately dyed beneath a bonnet of expensive and garish plumes. Her hands were large and her eyes were bold and her skin had become more roughened on the hunting field than Mathilde's had become among her clotheslines.

But the tight-waisted young man in the cocoa-colored coat was calling her "Duchess," and an officer of the Garde Royale was jostling to kiss her hand as they helped her into her cabriolet, laughing and simpering at everything she said.

To Mathilde, the woman's ugliness was a benediction. As she rose from the bench, she shook out her old skirts as though they were made of taffeta. She found a chemist's shop that was open even on Sunday to cater to court belles. To the clerk, who mistook her for somebody's servant, she gave most of her week's shopping money for a jar of cold cream. And as she boarded the crowded omnibus, it was as though invisible fops were kissing her hands.

As Mathilde came out of the alcove

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he saw that Monsieur Loisel had laid he table. He looked up from filling he new soup tureen.

"How nice you look!" he exclaimed.

"It is nothing," she replied shortly. Must you make a scene over it when wash my face and straighten my air?"

"But the collar and cuffs."

"They are old relics, I found them n the bottom of a drawer." She ooked at the table and spoke accus- ngly, "You unwrapped my parcel, he wine."

"Yes, I hoped it was wine. It made ne thirsty to hear the gurgling."

"It was supposed to be a surprise."

"The whole evening is a surprise," ıe drew back her chair. "I will attend o the stove. You might soil your uffs."

He handed her one of his large lean handkerchiefs. It was a long time ince they had used napkins.

"What foolery are you up to?" she lemanded.

"Not foolery — elegance." He sat pposite her. "When my wife brings ıome a jar of cold cream and a bottle f wine, I know where her thoughts ıre heading, and I hasten to con- orm." He reached for her glass and olished it with the handkerchief. 'And may I tell you, my dear, that ou have made me very glad?"

"Glad?" She looked at him curi- ously. "What have you to be glad bout?"

He put down the glass and regarded ıer with quizzical amusement.

"Because these things have given me the answer to a question — the question of your character."

As she returned his look, her voice was guarded. "You have had eleven years of me. You should know me pretty thoroughly by now."

"One cannot always be sure. Your sudden interest in cosmetics gave me quite a start just now." He removed the cover from the tureen and started to fill the soup bowls. "I have been asking myself, ever since we paid the last usurer, how much these last ten years had changed you. I see now that they have changed you very little."

"And you are glad?" she asked incredulously.

"Decidedly. I have thought over this matter of the cold cream and I have decided that I am exhilarated. During all these hard years, do you know what kept me going?"

"Necessity, I suppose."

"No. I could have run away. After all, you were the one who borrowed the necklace. And the one who lost it. All our neighbors knew that. I did not have to be involved." He put down his spoon and assumed a tone of bantering reproach. "My dear, I hope you do not mistake me for a saint. Or for one of those dull fellows of completely thoughtless nobility. I could be a rogue if I chose."

"You are talking like a book," she said. "You have been copying too many manuscripts. But why didn't you run off if you felt that way?"

He leaned toward her. "Because I knew I could never find anything I wanted as much as you. You were my

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only chance to be more than God made me. I never felt proud in my life until I had a woman who was too fine to be the wife of a clerk."

She looked down at her soup plate and saw that he had given her the largest piece of meat.

"Drink your wine," she said, "and let me have some."

He reached the bottle toward her glass.

"Did you notice that this bottle had been uncorked?" he asked.

"Of course it has! Do you think I could bring home a luxury if it were not cheap!" She was lying frantically and finding the task difficult. "I was passing a sidewalk restaurant in the Champs Élysées. A diner was leaving the table with his wine scarcely touched. I made a bargain with the waiter who was cleaning up."

"And a fine bargain," he said, sipping his glass. "If we are to return to the Rue des Martyrs, we must reacclimatize ourselves to little comforts. I am sorry about the cold cream. I tried to save some of it, but it was full of broken glass."

She pushed back her chair. "I had better go clean it up."

"Stop, Madame!" he cried with humorous emphasis. "On the day our last debt was paid, you were through being a janitress. I gave our landlord a piece of my mind, I can tell you! All those years you slaved for him — for a few sous deducted from our rent. If you touch those stairs now he may think I am weakening. I absolutely forbid it."

She made an ironic gesture with her lips and started to get up.

"Please!" he said. "I have begun to feel like a husband again. Do not deny me my self-respect."

She shrugged and sipped her wine.

"If we hurry, we can go to vespers," she said.

"Not tonight." He drank deeply. "Tonight let us sit and talk. Next month we shall be back in our old parish. We will ask for a pew in the middle aisle, and you will have a new bonnet and a new dress."

She made her voice scornful. "Even if our savings would pay for it, the parish would laugh at me. And it would have a right to — a janitress got up in clothes like that."

"Nonsense! How will they know you were a janitress? One appears in a new neighborhood. One makes no reference to a former life. If you look prosperous, you are taken at face value! No questions asked."

She looked at him sharply. Was he reading her thoughts? She had been thinking about this all the way home in the omnibus. There were other cities beside Paris — Lyons or Bordeaux. They would accept her as a rich widow if she appeared there with the money from the necklace. No questions would be asked. After he went to work tomorrow, she would sell the necklace and never come back.

She looked at him again and saw him wool-gathering. No chance of his reading anyone's thoughts! The whole thing would be easy. She became

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angered at his guilelessness.

"I know why you go to vespers no more," she sneered. "And why you sneak in at the back of the church for mass. It is because you feel guilty."

"Guilty?" His look was troubled. "Why should I feel guilty?"

"Because we have no children. We've been too poor to risk it! You think that's a sin — you know you do and you hate me for it."

"No — I don't think it's a sin."

"I wake up at night," she continued cruelly, "to see you telling your beads — you're begging God to forgive you, aren't you?"

He shoved back his chair with a loud clatter. He came toward her around the table. And he strove to control his voice.

"I ask God to understand," he said gently, "and I think He does. I wish that you could."

"You want me to have a child — " Her voice was edged with fear, "now that the debt is paid. Is that it?"

"No. It would be too dangerous. You are past thirty and that is much too late in life for the first child. So I have made myself forget it."

She wanted to strike him. He was too good. Too sanctimonious.

Some uncontrollable impulse made her want to goad him, to break his smugness; so that, when the blow fell, he would know all that he was missing.

"Oh, no, I'm not! Not if we had money enough! Child bearing is no problem at the new English hospital in the Rue de Villiers! They have made it perfectly safe! Not one death from child-bed fever! But they won't let you in the door for less than four thousand francs!"

"Mathilde! Be quiet! I know you are as disappointed as I am, but don't excite yourself."

"I am not excited! You are! I can see it in your face. Shall we go to the loan sharks? We have slaved for my vanity, now we can slave for yours. For four thousand francs you can have your precious son — "

He struck her a hard stinging blow, right across the mouth. She looked up at him in amazement.

"I had not thought of a son," he said, "but once I hoped for a daughter."

The hysteria had gone out of her. But she still contradicted him.

"I cannot understand you. All men want sons."

It was the first sarcastic smile she ever had seen on his face.

"Perhaps I have been deficient in vanity," he said, "but I found little about myself to perpetuate. The world is never short of clerks. But you always seemed different to me. Even when I tried to look at you realistically, when I admitted that the years have brought changes and that your petulance had soured into surliness, I was still proud of your narrow waist and straight back. Every man needs some vanity. I told myself I would be happy when we returned to the Rue de Martyrs and I could compare my hostess with the wives of the other clerks. Now I am not so sure. The faces of those other women are flabby and stupid — but, for the most part,

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they are kind.

"For a long time," he said, "I told myself I had wronged you. You seemed too good to be the wife of a clerk. I hoped some day I could see your youth and prettiness repeated in a daughter. I felt that if I could work for her, and provide her with a dowry, something like the amount we saved for the necklace, I would somehow be making things right, and paying for a blessing I had not deserved."

There was a long silence in the room before he turned to her and added, without bitterness, "You see, in spite of the fact that you read the novels, while I only copied them, I am the one who has been the sentimentalist and the fool. I tried to give you something you had no use for — something you didn't want — the knowledge that there was one person out of all humanity who cared whether you lived or died. The feeling that there was one person in this world who would always remember your beauty and want to see it preserved. . . . Instead of helping you pay for the necklace, I should have given you what money I had ten years ago, and told you to go away."

She got up and spoke in a flat voice.

"I am tired," she said, "I am going to bed. It has been an exhausting day."

For a long time he sat looking at the stars, waiting until he was sure she would be asleep. Then he undressed silently and turned out the lamp.

He moved softly into the curtained alcove and reached for his worn rosary.

But as he touched it, his hand drew back and he gasped a choked exclamation of surprise.

There on the bedpost, intertwined with the smoothly-worn prayer beads, he saw the diamond necklace shining softly like the tears of a Magdalene.

Mathilde lay beside her sleeping husband and her face was misty with tears. She had forced herself to one great moment of unselfishness and she asked God, desperately, to somehow make it last. She prayed with anxiety and humility. For she finally knew herself.

When their neighbors found them on Monday morning, there was a look of tranquillity upon the faces of Monsieur Loisel and his bride. After much discussion, the priest of their parish finally decided that they should be buried in consecrated soil, side by side. Despite the fact the police found poison in their wine bottle, the priest was not quite willing to call it suicide. He felt that their deaths might be somehow linked with the mystery of the big blond man who was found that same morning at the foot of the tenement stairs. Apparently there had been an accident. Investigation revealed a smear of cold cream on his right boot — and in his pocket, a necklace valued at sixty thousand francs.

He was a very fashionable physician, but he couldn't cure his own broken neck.

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It is a genuine delight and privilege — indeed, a heart-warming honor — to welcome Howard Haycraft to the staff of EQMM. Mr. Haycraft is the author, as you undoubtedly know, of MURDER FOR PLEASURE (*Appleton-Century, 1941*), *the first full-length study of the detective story published in the United States — a book so "grand and fascinating" (in the words of Rex Stout), of such "permanent value" (Erle Stanley Gardner's judgment), so "extremely well written and salted with wit and humor" (William Lyon Phelps's praise), so "remarkable and necessary" (quoting Vincent Starrett), a book so "monumental" that overnight it established Mr. Haycraft as the foremost historian of the detective story in America.*

Beginning with this issue, Mr. Haycraft inaugurates a department of comment and criticism written especially for readers of EQMM. The department is called "Speaking of Crime," and for a short period (very short, we hope!) it will appear only every other month; but as soon as Mr. Haycraft can properly organize his work schedule, "Speaking of Crime" will become a regular monthly feature in the now-monthly EQMM.

In his letter accompanying his first "column" Mr. Haycraft writes: "One point, I think, is worth stressing — that 'Speaking of Crime' is not committed to any fixed form." We heartily concur; in fact, we take this editorial opportunity to guarantee Mr. Haycraft free rein. The space allotted to his department is all his and his alone: he may write what he pleases, the way he pleases, and when he pleases; he may agree with E.Q., or disagree with E.Q., as his honest judgment of detective fiction dictates, and we go on record here and now, publicly and in print, that never under any circumstances whatever will we tie a string to Mr. Haycraft's freedom of speech and pursuit of 'tec truth.

To paraphrase the great Patrick Henry — if this be reason, Howard, make the most of it!

SPEAKING OF CRIME

A Department of Comment and Criticism

by HOWARD HAYCRAFT

OF ALL the evidence of respectability accumulated by the mystery-crime-detective story in recent years, not the least tangible and important has been the growth of a substantial body of critical literature. Where once detective story review departments were the exception, they are now the rule in virtually all the important journals. Meanwhile, increasing num-

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bers of intellectuals have turned their attention to the whodunit in an effort to find out what makes it tick. More serious critical comment, both in and out of the review columns, is being devoted today to the detective story (and its relations-by-marriage) than at any time in its 100-year history.

Believing that the state of detective story criticism is a matter of legitimate interest to readers, this "department of comment and criticism" proposes to summarize and discuss, from time to time, outstanding trends, developments, and articles in the critical field.

Let us consider this month the singular case of Edmund Wilson, the eminent "New Yorker" critic, whose triple-barrelled attack on the modern detective story and its followers a short time ago touched off one of the sharpest literary controversies in many years. Now, I am not among those who contend that Mr. Wilson should be boiled in oil or decapitated. I even suspect that his animadversions may have done the *genre* an indirect favor, by disturbing a certain smugness into which some readers and writers (and critics) of the police novel have fallen. But I do charge that his arguments are based on insufficient data, that his conclusions are not warranted by the evidence he has adduced, and that at least one of his pronouncements is pretty irresponsible stuff for a major critic of his reputation to be talking.

Let's suppose — by way of analogy — that I were to review in these columns a half dozen volumes of modern poetry, stating as a premise that I had never read any modern poetry and had long been puzzled by those who profess to enjoy it. Proceeding from this unbiased approach, I make a finding and derive a conclusion. The finding is that I don't like modern poetry and can't understand what others see in it. The conclusion is that, ergo, they only *think* they enjoy it; that it has become to them a habit, a "drug." Surely, Mr. Wilson would be the first to decry such heads-I-win-tails-you-lose reasoning. Yet such, in essence, was the method and substance of his first onslaught on the whodunit.

In a second article Mr. Wilson reported on older works which indignant readers of the first article had recommended to his attention. Here again he argued (by invitation, it is true) from isolated examples rather than knowledge of the field as a whole or any very clear conception of what the crime-detective story is and is not. His finding this time was that the books were "dull," "ill-written," and "boring" (all matters of personal opinion, of course); his rather shocking conclusion, that paper should not be wasted on publishing "this rubbish." In a third article he examined the Sherlock Holmes saga, to the disparagement of the modern product.

By reducing his criticism to the level of like-and-don't-like, Mr. Wilson invited and brought on a shouting-match of denial and affirmation with incensed partisans of the detective story which has tended to obscure

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the essential invalidity of his attack. Avoiding the temptation to debate minor issues with him — to point out, for example, that the test of "good writing" is its effectiveness within its own frame of reference — that to credit the detective story (as he has) with creating the illusion of suspense is high praise rather than otherwise — that the nostalgic charm of the Baker Street legends is as critically incomparable with the appeal of the present-day whodunit as Trollope is to Hemingway; avoiding such fascinating by-paths of fallacy and refutation, it seems to me that there are three fundamental weaknesses in Mr. Wilson's position:

First, no one has any intention of compelling him to read detective stories if he does not choose to do so.

Second, when he — on the other hand — virtually advocates the prohibition of detective stories ("we shall do well to discourage the squandering of . . . paper") because he, Wilson, does not like them, he has abused the critical prerogative and come perilously close to suppressive censorship of the *genus* blue-nose. No one will dispute Mr. Wilson's right to express his likes and dislikes as freely, violently, and publicly as he may wish, with or without adequate basis. But when he proposes to make them mandatory on others — well, I simply refuse to believe that a critic of his demonstrated integrity and stature in other fields could have meant seriously what he seems to have said.

Third, even were we to accept his arguments as valid, Mr. Wilson has proved in the final analysis nothing more profound than the fact that the modern whodunit is meat to some men, poison to others. It seems, somehow, that this should have been apparent without so much work.

Mr. Wilson's curious desire to make others sing to his tune in this matter has caused considerable speculation. One clue to his behavior, it seems to me, has been overlooked. As the Holmesian scholar he has shown himself to be, Mr. Wilson is of course familiar with the Conanical apocrypha — those unpublished adventures of The Master which Dr. Watson tells us repose in a tin dispatch box somewhere in the vaults of Cox's bank, at Charing Cross. One of these, mentioned by Watson in *The Adventure of Black Peter*, illustrates again the oddly prophetic faculty so often demonstrated by Doyle. Sherlockians will have anticipated me. I refer, of course, to The Case of Wilson, the Notorious Canary Trainer.

Among the Recent Mysteries

Perhaps the brightest aspect of a mystery season that cannot by any stretch of the imagination be called a vintage year is the emergence of several better-than-average first novels. Of those which have reached my desk up to press-time, I recommend three to your attention:

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Elinor Chamberlain's APPOINTMENT IN MANILA (Dodd, Mead), a smooth and literate study of murder, Japanese deviltry, and American greed in the Philippines (time: late 1941), might well have been issued as a "straight" novel had it not won the publishers' Red Badge Prize. Miss Chamberlain formerly taught English in the University of the Philippines. She uses her background material with restraint and to excellent effect, handles narrative and character in experienced fashion, and conceals the identity of her murderer well until almost the last, when deduction gives way to shooting.

Another newcomer who has turned his own experiences to good account is Sgt. Julian Fast, whose WATCHFUL BY NIGHT (Farrar & Rinehart) is a fresh and immediate first mystery of the deduction-cum-action school, pleasantly told. A tale of multiple homicide and native Fascism centering around the medical laboratory of an Army camp near Boston, its chief shortcoming is one common to beginners: too many suspects too vaguely identified. (When the culprit was revealed I had difficulty placing him.) Incidentally, Sgt. Fast's mystery is one of the curiously few to employ the military aspects of the war as background material. The only previous book-length examples I can recall (I stand open to correction) are Lt. Allan Bosworth's story of sabotage on a submarine, FULL CRASH DIVE, and Colin Curzon's THE BODY IN THE BARRAGE BALLOON, both published two or three years ago.

When is a new author not a new author? Maurice Walsh's novels of Irish and Scottish country life have been deservedly popular on both sides of the water for a good twenty years, but so far as I can ascertain, NINE STRINGS TO YOUR BOW (Lippincott) is his first detective story. To his new *métier* Mr. Walsh brings the urbanity, flavor, and artful characterization that have marked his previous writing, together with sound sleuthing and an original and ingratiating Irish detective, Con Madden, who should move rapidly to the head of the class. The other participants are Scottish and the scene is the Scottish lowlands. Though the puzzle is not too hard to guess, and though some American readers may find the action a bit slow-paced, NINE STRINGS TO YOUR BOW qualifies as one of the superior mysteries of the year. It should appeal particularly to admirers of Ngaio Marsh.

Hitting the season's high spots:

Purists, I am afraid, will deal pretty severely with the overly-complex solution of Mary Roberts Rinehart's THE YELLOW ROOM (Farrar & Rinehart), the first new novel in three years by the dean of American mystery writers. Otherwise, this story of murder and inevitable romance in a Maine summer colony in wartime is told with the author's familiar narrative skill and warm human sympathy.

Honors for the season's most skilful deductive plotting belong, without much question, to Helen McCloy's THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY (Morrow). A little less psychological talk would

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have made this an even better book, although psychiatry plays a leading part in the deductions of criminologist Basil Willing (now a four-striper in U. S. Naval Intelligence) leading to his exposure of a murderous Nazi fugitive in the Scottish highlands. Miss McCloy's mature and finished novel also packs the year's most expert surprise ending.

H. C. Bailey's THE WRONG MAN (Crime Club) begins with an irritatingly hearty American colonel, on apparently indefinite leave, who stumbles onto unnatural death and other sordid dealings in evacuated England while looking up the wife of a supposedly deceased British buddy. After a long arid stretch, due to inadequate motivation, the story comes partially to life when that old rapscallion Joshua Clunk is called in. But the subtle styling and characterization we have come to expect from Bailey are almost totally absent: some of the actors are only faceless names and some of the confusing relationships are never satisfactorily explained.

Readers of THE SMELL OF MONEY a season or so ago will not need to be reminded that Matthew Head is an unorthodox young author who achieves his effects with wit, verve, and imagination. In THE DEVIL IN THE BUSH (Simon & Schuster) he has added to these ingredients some fascinating and authentic detail about life in a miniscule European colony deep in the African bush, and a cast of sharply etched characters, not borrowed from stock. There is nothing intricate or even particularly baffling about either puzzle or solution of this hard-to-classify novel, but the story which links them comes close to being the season's most readable.

Recommended Reading

Action: THE CASE OF THE HALF-WAKENED WIFE by Erle Stanley Gardner (Mill); THE GIRL WITH THE FRIGHTENED EYES by Lawrence Lariar (Dodd, Mead); WOMAN AT BAY by George Harmon Coxe (Knopf); MARKED FOR MURDER by Brett Halliday (Dodd, Mead).

Anthologies: ROGUES' GALLERY edited by Ellery Queen (Little, Brown); THE PORTABLE MURDER BOOK edited by Joseph Henry Jackson (Viking).

Background: DEATH OF A SWAGMAN by Arthur W. Upfield (Crime Club); MURDER BEFORE MIDNIGHT by A. B. Cunningham (Dutton); PORT OF SEVEN STRANGERS by Kathleen Moore Knight (Crime Club); DEATH SAILS IN A HIGH WIND by Theodora Du Bois (Crime Club).

Deduction: FOUR PAST FOUR by Roy Vickers (Jefferson House); PUZZLE FOR WANTONS by Patrick Quentin (Simon & Schuster); V AS IN VICTIM by Lawrence Treat (Duell, Sloan & Pearce); THE SCARLET BUTTON by Anthony Gilbert (A. S. Barnes).

Humor: THE OWL IN THE CELLAR by Margaret Scherf (Crime Club).

Romance: DARK PROPHECY by Marjorie Alan (Mill).

Suspense: DREAD JOURNEY by Dorothy B. Hughes (Duell, Sloan & Pearce).

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At the time of this writing, Anthony Boucher is brain-deep in two highly confidential literary assignments — very hush-hush and supersecret, since they involve two famous names among etheric, if not precisely ethereal, detectives. Indeed, if the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth were told, fandom might easily be shocked and a scandal in Detectivania would be afoot. Be that as it may, Mr. Boucher's work schedule is a mere eight days to the week — which explains why we have not heard from our fly-swatting dipsodetective, Nick Noble, for more than a year.

Welcome home, Nick. We've been saving a bottle of prewar Harvey's Bristol Cream for you, and we're lucky to have that these new-vintage days. . . .

One of crime fiction's favorite gambits is the theme of collectors and collections. Almost every type of treasured object has been the focal point of theft and/or murder: rare books, coins, and stamps; china, silver, and glassware; paintings, tapestries, statuary; historic mementoes, historic documents, historic knickknacks; letters, autographs, manuscripts; jewels, clocks, snuff boxes; yes, even — there's one famous case on record — corpses! But to the best of your Editor's knowledge, the collection that backgrounds this new Noble strikes a fresh note in detective fiction. It is a collection of records — musical records — a collecting mania that has made enormous strides in recent years.

So here's something new about old Nick: motive and music, opportunity and opera, means and melody — a double treat of roguery and recordings. . . .

LIKE COUNT PALMIERI

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

NICK NOBLE noticed the little man entering the Chula Negra as he noticed everything, cursorily but completely. The little man was slight, hardly taller or heavier than Noble himself, and he was having trouble with a heavy parcel, paper-wrapped and about a foot square. He set it carefully down on the counter, sighed with relief, and gasped, "Beer . . .!" Lucita, Mamá Gonzales' elder and plumper daughter, served him; and breath and life came back into him as he drank.

He wiped his face, which had the odd gift of sweating heavily without reddening, ordered another beer, and looked idly at the juke box beside the counter. Then his idle gaze changed to a startling double take. He got up, fumbling for a nickel, and approached the box incredulously.

From his regular post in the fourth booth on the left, Nick Noble could

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hardly hear the record. He concluded that it must be an old pre-electric recording; Mamá Gonzales kept a few such in the box for sentimental reasons. But he could almost hear it simply by watching the expression of growing ecstasy on the little man's face.

Nick Noble sat quietly drinking his sherry and watching the comedy. The man turned and spoke rapidly to Lucita, who shrugged. He insisted, and she went back to the kitchen. Now Mamá Gonzales herself came out, trailing clouds of red pepper and bitter chocolate (today was Wednesday: *lengua en mole*). In no time at all she and the stranger had reached a complete misunderstanding, which Lucita was helpless to straighten out.

At last the little man asked loudly and plaintively: "Can anybody here interpret for me?"

Nick Noble's curiosity is not confined to the criminological. He eased himself out of the booth and came up to the small group. The stranger, after one surprised glance at Noble's pale, almost subterranean face, explained the situation.

He pointed at the juke label, which stated:

16 CENICIENTA — Geyer

"It isn't possible," he said breathlessly. "I'd have sworn she never recorded it. But there it is. *Cenicienta* — Italian *Cenerentola*, English *Cinderella* — is a Rossini opera. Wonderful coloratura contralto role — never very popular in this country — nobody sings it anywhere since Supervia died. I knew Geyer used to sing it occasionally in her younger days — incredible range! — but a record. . . . Listen!"

He put in another nickel. The old recording came through faintly ("On my own machine I can turn up the volume," the man explained) but impressively. The music was not in itself great, but the perfect vehicle for the greatest voice of this century, that of Lena Geyer. The absolute authority of the recitative, the agile clarity of the coloratura passages impressed even Nick Noble. He remembered, for the first time in twenty years, that Martha had loved opera, and had been communicating her enthusiasm to him when . . .

The record ended, and Mamá Gonzales burst out. Nick Noble listened and gave a condensed translation: "Brought it from Mexico. Belonged to her mother. Wouldn't think of parting with it."

The little man presented a card which read:

MATTESON & HARBRECHT
Attorneys-at-law
VINCENT MATTESON

With it he passed over a five-dollar bill, then, as Mamá Gonzales remained adamant, a ten. Then he took out his checkbook. Still she shook her head. He went over to the counter and undid the parcel.

"I've been record-hunting in the Main Street shops. I had good luck,

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too. There are some finds here. Tell her she can have any or all of them."

The request was translated and rejected. Mr. Matteson sighed. "Then do you think . . . as a very special favor . . . she might . . . let me see the record?"

Mamá Gonzales smiled like one indulging a child's whim, went around behind the juke box, and fetched out the disc. It bore a faded label that Nick Noble had never seen before, but Matteson recognized it. "Of course!" he observed to himself, cradling the record tenderly. "A Musofonia. Small company that used to specialize in the Latin-American trade — they go in more for these lesser Italian operas than we do. . . . Madam, what do you mean by wearing out this priceless treasure in a juke box?"

Her answer, omitting the saints and such, boiled down to she had no other phonograph to play her sainted mother's records on and it wouldn't wear out because nobody ever wanted to pay a nickel to hear it.

Regretfully Mr. Matteson set the record down. "Give her the card. Tell her to get in touch with me if she changes her mind. Meanwhile . . . I imagine I'll be around again." He rewrapped his parcel. "Thank you for your assistance, sir."

As he departed, Nick Noble looked with amusement at his untouched second beer, forgotten in the excitement. Then he looked at the record on the counter and cried, "Hi!"

It was not the Lena Geyer. It was *Ernani involami* sung by Celestina Boninsegna. And under it were the five and the ten, neatly folded.

Noble's "Hi!" brought Mr. Matteson back. He took the Geyer out of his parcel, replaced the Boninsegna therein, and pocketed the bills. "Well," he smiled dryly, "no harm in trying, was there?"

After that, Mr. Matteson became a regular customer of the Chula Negra. Not such a fixture as Nick Noble; but whenever he went exploring in the Main Street second-hand record stores, he stopped by for a beer and a nickel's worth of Lena Geyer. He even brought his partner in to hear the treasure.

Milton Harbrecht was also a record collector, but of a much more ponderous sort. While there was something almost charming in Mr. Matteson's naive enthusiasm, Harbrecht took his position seriously, as befitted a man of his substantial appearance. "I tell you, Noble," he declaimed, "we collectors are benefiting humanity. Without us, the great voices of the first quarter of this century would be lost forever. We are preserving beauty from oblivion. I look upon it as a public trust — in fact, I have been considering leaving my entire collection to the state university, with a proper endowment for upkeep."

His pomposity faded a little when he listened to Geyer, but it returned full force when Lieutenant MacDonald (of Homicide) dropped in with the Larrimore file. He was almost rude

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in his abrupt and majestic departure, and Mr. Matteson explained: "He hates co——er, police officers. Some prank of his youth landed him in their custody, and he has never forgotten the treatment he received. Of course, I realize that times have changed —"

"Not quite," MacDonald admitted. "We still have the petty sadists with us. In fact, I once had the pleasure of sending one such to the lethal gas chamber — or rather, Nick here did."

Mr. Matteson's eyes widened; lawyer though he was, he listened with almost a layman's puzzled awe to an account of the Barker case and Nick Noble's role in it. He proved such an agreeably impressed audience that he was allowed to remain while Noble looked over the Larrimore file and gave his verdict.

"Fraud, of course," he said when his pallid eyes unglazed. "Corpse has nicotine stains only on *back* of teeth: means pipe. Pictures" — he waved at several glossy prints — "with cigaret. If an author doesn't smoke pipe in publicity stills, doesn't smoke it at all. So it isn't Larrimore."

Mr. Matteson goggled. He left with MacDonald, and heard from the Lieutenant the story of how Nick Noble had sunk from the brightest officer on the force to a thinking machine fueled by sherry. And he went home still goggling.

It was a week later that MacDonald looked in at the fourth booth on the left. "It's your friend Matteson, Nick," he said.

Nick Noble raised his eyes from his sherry. "Client of yours?"

"Not strictly. He's alive, and my clients are usually dead. But somebody's tried to steal all his beautiful records."

"So what brings you in?"

"He came to me about it, since he'd met me. And because there's an attempted homicide involved, I managed to stretch a point and get in on it."

"Tell," said Nick Noble tersely.

"His man, Charles Wilson, sleeps in a room next to the precious music room. He woke up last night to find somebody leaning over his bed and about to stab him. Saw moonlight on the blade. Now Wilson's a Negro, but he'd be a great disappointment to fiction writers. He didn't think it was a ghost, nor start rolling his eyes in terror, nor mutter 'Feet, do yo' stuff!' nor any of the other things that make nice comedy relief. He very sensibly and capably rolled off the bed and under it. The knife went into his pillow. He tried to grab the attacker's feet from under the bed, but they got away. The intruder went into the music room, but Wilson was close on his heels, with his own knife; so the intruder made a quick exit out the window. Wilson followed, but lost his would-be murderer in the grounds. Then Wilson roused the household and they staged a general search which accomplished nothing but trampling out the invader's footprints."

Nick Noble nodded. "Any ideas?"

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"Matteson doesn't think it was an ordinary burglar, because such don't know about the value of old records. I think he's right, but some smart boy may have caught on by now. He thinks it's an inside job framed to look pro, and he may have something there."

"Suspects?"

"He wants me to come out there to dinner tonight," MacDonald answered indirectly, "and bring you along. Want to come? You can meet the household and judge for yourself."

Nick Noble hesitated.

"Collecting runs in the family," MacDonald added. "Matteson's father collected sherry."

Nick Noble smiled.

The Matteson home was impressively lost among trees and shrubs in a canyon in Beverly Hills. MacDonald was about to ring the doorbell when Nick Noble tried the knob and found it unlocked. He shoved the door open and stepped in, saying, "You never know. . . ."

"Scotland Yard wouldn't approve," MacDonald observed, and followed him.

There was no one in the unobtrusively comfortable rooms at the front of the house. As they went down the hall, they passed an open door through which they could see walls lined with record-shelves. In a room a little way beyond a voice was speaking. "No, no. Ten fifty," Mr. Matteson was saying as they came level with the door of his study. "Yes. Wait till you see their —" He broke off and nodded to his guests. "Right. Goodbye." He hung up the telephone. "Good evening, gentlemen. Where's Wilson, confound him?"

"No one answered," MacDonald lied. "Making a date or bidding for some more records?"

"What? Oh. Ten fifty. Does one make dates for such oddly precise minutes? I was arguing with that partner of mine. He's compiling a Chaliapin discography, and I caught an error in his listing of *Down the Petersky*. Victor record number 1050."

"I wondered about prices," MacDonald mused as Mr. Matteson rang for drinks. "Ten fifty would seem a lot for a record."

"Would it?" The collector laughed. "Of course the so-called 'classical' records don't fetch such fabulous prices as hot jazz. The hot collectors will readily pay up to and over a hundred dollars for old originals. With us — well, the scarcer old vocals run about five dollars from a dealer who specializes, and much less from one who doesn't. I've made great finds for a quarter — and then again at auctions I've been forced up to twenty-five dollars. And of course there are certain records, like Lilli Lehmann's Odeons and some of those obscure Geyers, that just never come on the market at all."

"Then at that rate, when a burglar could be spending his time and effort on diamonds, say, would he be able to carry off enough records to make it worth his while?"

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"I rather doubt," said Mr. Matteson obscurely, "that this burglar is interested in profit."

At that point Wilson came in with the drinks. The Negro was a handsome man of the North African type. He moved gracefully, and it was easy to imagine his deft evasion of the knife in the darkness. "Mrs. Hodzak says dinner will be ready when you've finished your drinks, sir," he announced as he set down the tray.

"How good a look did you get at your assailant, Wilson?" MacDonald asked.

"Frankly, sir, none. I saw the knife rather than the man, and when I chased him he kept well ahead of me."

"If he hadn't attacked you, he might have pulled off his job. Why did he bother?"

"The music-room windows are soundly latched on the inside, but I sleep with my window open. I suppose that was the nearest way in to the room he wanted. I must have moved in my sleep some way, giving him the idea that I'd seen him."

"Shrewd man," MacDonald nodded when Wilson had gone. "That's about the way Nick and I had doped it. — Nick! What's the matter?"

Nick Noble stared bitterly at his glass. "First good sherry in twenty years. And my buds so rotted I can't taste it. . . ."

One reason why MacDonald had welcomed the dinner invitation was pure curiosity. He had never seen Nick Noble put anything solid in his mouth, and he wanted to watch. But his curiosity remained ungratified; whenever he looked down the table, Noble was sipping his wine (he had persuaded his host to give him the domestic cooking sherry from the kitchen instead of wasting on his tasteless mouth the noble product of Jérez de la Frontera); and yet somehow his plate was clean at the end of the meal. MacDonald indulged in unprofitable speculations about osmosis.

He had plenty of time for speculation during dinner. Table talk did not precisely flow. Mr. Matteson's mind was in the music room, as though another attempt on his beloved discs might be made at any moment. His son and daughter both ate as though it were a convenience and an economy to eat at home, but an ordeal that there was no sense in prolonging.

These children of Matteson's were alike only in their obvious distaste for their home. The son, Edgar, MacDonald put down as that new breed of pharisee, the scientific prig. His father's occasional attempts at conversation, whether chat about his collection or shop talk arising from his profession or the Lieutenant's, were sharply squelched by the youth, who felt that nothing on earth had any importance if it could not be verified in a laboratory. He had one in the rear of the house where, in his hours away from the University, he carried on certain researches which he veiled in awesome mystery.

"My God, pater," he said once

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(and MacDonald winced at a locution which he had never heard on American lips before), "if you only collected decent recordings, one might understand. This is the fifth decade of the twentieth century, and you're collecting coal-oil lamps and buggy-robes!"

Mr. Matteson protested that a great performance archaically recorded might outweigh a mediocre one presented with all the marvels of modern science; but Edgar's lofty mind had retired to the laboratory.

Celia said little, possibly because speech might disarrange the perpetual pout into which her lips had settled. She was pretty — or at least she was young enough to seem so — but her prettiness was not enhanced by a dinner gown which even MacDonald knew was not this season's. She confined herself to pursing up the pout even more bitterly whenever records were mentioned. Her mind was also elsewhere; MacDonald's guess as to where was confirmed when Wilson announced that a Mr. Woodruff was waiting. For an instant the pout vanished, and there was almost life in her face as she left the table abruptly and without goodbyes.

Edgar started after her, and answered his father's "Young man, where do you think you're going?" with a terse, "Lab."

"You were working there last night too?" MacDonald asked.

"When the man with the knife tried to do something useful with those records? Yes. And all the to-do ruined the timing on an experiment."

Everyone has obsessions, MacDonald reflected; and the secret of a happy family is to share them. But if the family is dividedly obsessed, some by records, some by laboratories, some by Mr. Woodruffs; and if the family money goes for only one of those obsessions . . .

He was not unprepared for the theories which Mr. Matteson advanced over coffee in the music room.

". . . an inside job," the little man repeated. "Which reduces it to four people. Mrs. Hodzak, the cook, was at her home that night; I checked with her sister. So that leaves . . ." He held up four fingers and began ticking them off as though the names were those of impersonal strangers. "*Edgar.* He's always wanting money for his ridiculous laboratory, and how does he expect me to help him when he refuses even to explain his work to me? Says a mind like mine couldn't be expected — Bah . . . *Celia.*" (Tick.) "But not for money. Not that she couldn't use some, but her feline little mind would like nothing better than —"

"Smash," said Nick Noble, with a comprehensive gesture.

"Exactly. Shatter, destroy this whole collection out of pure spite, and blame it on a burglar. That would be Celia."

"That's two," said MacDonald.

Reluctantly Mr. Matteson ticked down a third finger. "*Wilson.* You called him shrewd. He is. He could have invented that whole story, slashed his pillow with a knife —"

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"Why?"

"In his case, I should imagine, pure commercialism. Some opportunity to dispose of the records to a rival collector —"

"— such as your partner?"

Mr. Matterson nodded. "And that . . ." His remaining finger ticked down. He spoke awkwardly, hesitantly. "That brings me to the fourth."

"I see. You have items he wants as badly as that?"

"Not only the items, though there *is* that complete file of Nordicas. . . . No . . . Lieutenant," he said abruptly, "I'm afraid. This burglar tried to kill Wilson, and with damned little reason. I'm afraid that was only a build-up. My partner and I have made wills leaving our estates to each other — our residual estates, that is. Milton, who is fortunate enough to be a bachelor, can afford many philanthropic legacies, while I must make proper provision for these . . . these serpent's teeth of mine. But my residue, I may say without boasting, is quite enough to assure at least a keen interest on Milton's part if anything were to . . . happen to me in a burglary."

MacDonald leaned forward seriously. "Mr. Matteson —" he began; but at that moment Nick Noble, who had been poking at the files, came up with a record. "Like to hear this," he said.

It was Chaliapin's *Down the Petersky*, Victor 1050.

Mr. Matteson played it — a rowdy roistering street song, delivered with all the legendary Chaliapin vigor — and was launched on his hobby. He seemed almost to forget the question of burglary (and murder?) as he explained and demonstrated his collection and his custom-built record-player — his one concession to the attainments of modern science.

MacDonald learned a great deal. He learned that the single records (which constituted the bulk of the collection, since it went back to the days before album sets) were filed in shelves, alphabetically under record companies and numerically under order number, and were fully cross-indexed, by composer, title and performer, in an elaborate card catalog (although Mr. Matteson seemed to know the numbers of most of his favorites without reference to the index) — all of which meant that a thief would have to count on considerable undisturbed time if he were to locate the more valuable records. He would also need specialized knowledge, since an admirable record may also be a very common one.

MacDonald learned other facts not so professionally relevant. He learned to admire the chaste bel canto of Boninsegna or Battistini, the rich authority of José Mardones, the impeccable artistry of Edmond Clément — none of whom, he confessed, he had ever heard of before. And he learned, when he inquired about Patti, that no contemporary ear can judge her by the wretched recordings of the last shreds of her voice.

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Mr. Matteson had just finished playing Geyer's record of the great *scena* from *Fidelio*, and MacDonald's eyes were popping. "It's true," he said. "There were giants on the earth in those days. After that, even Flagstad . . ." He broke off and watched his host curiously. The little man had refiled the Geyer, and stood there twitching nervously. Then he reached behind the stack of opera libretti in the adjacent cabinet and took out something which he laid gingerly on the table.

It was a .45 automatic.

"I'm afraid," he said frankly. "And all the time we've been playing records — yes, I have a permit of course — I've been getting more afraid. For my records and — well, for me. Tell me, Lieutenant: do you believe in hunches?"

"Sometimes," MacDonald said cautiously.

"He's coming tonight." It was a flat statement of fact. "I feel it in my marrow. He's coming and . . . You're armed, Lieutenant?"

MacDonald patted his shoulder.

"I realize what an imposition it must seem. But this man is a killer, Lieutenant. Wilson will tell you that. And if you could see your way clear to — to a vigil with me . . . ?"

MacDonald looked at Nick Noble. Noble held up his personal bottle of kitchen sherry; it was almost half full. MacDonald nodded.

A change seemed to come over Mr. Matteson, as though the sharing of his burden had all but removed it. He moved about the room briskly, lightly, arranging bottles and glasses convenient to chairs, closing the record-player, opening the curtains. Then he switched off the lights.

MacDonald drew his own automatic and placed it on the table ready to his hand. Then they sat, in the quiet darkness. MacDonald spoke rarely and Nick Noble never; but Mr. Matteson occasionally broke the stillness to tell some amusing collectors' anecdote or to wonder audibly for whom they were waiting.

MacDonald wondered too. He wondered what manner of man could speculate so calmly about his son, his daughter and his partner. He wondered what sort of lawyer Mr. Matteson was, and if he ever came alive in the courtroom to nearly the extent that he did in his music room. . . .

MacDonald's eyes were shutting after an hour in the dark. They blinked open as he thought he heard a sound in the next room. He was struggling to keep them open when the door swung inward.

The faint light from the hall outlined a figure of medium height, heavy or heavily wrapped. It crossed the room silently and paused before the files of records. It stretched out a hand in the dimness, and MacDonald said levelly, "You're covered, my bucko."

The figure recklessly whirled and fired. MacDonald's gun answered, and a second flash came from beside him. Somewhere in the noise of the two shots was the astonished cry of a

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ıuman voice, probably Nick Noble's. The figure toppled over.

MacDonald switched on the table amp. Noble was clutching Mr. Matteson's right arm, but the little man hook loose and started forward at he same time as MacDonald. They ollided and sprawled, their autonatics crashing on the floor. MacDonald stumbled to his feet, reached he fallen figure, and recoiled in astonishment.

It was not the figure's identity that o astonished him. The ponderous partner Harbrecht had been his favorte candidate from the start. It was he fact that the man was dying.

MacDonald had aimed for his legs. The right side of his face was torn ıway. The dying man's lips twitched ınd something like comprehension glittered for a second in his eyes. He ıaid, "Like Palmieri . . ."

By the time MacDonald had traveled to the table for whisky and brought it back, the dying man was still.

Matteson stood there beside the dead intruder, his feet firmly planted, his body all ajerk with petty movements. "Milton Harbrecht . . ." he kept saying. "My partner . . . He wanted to . . . My partner . . ." At last he desisted from the litany and said, "Thank God, at least I didn't kill him."

"So?"

"I shot him in the thigh. Lieutenant, you didn't have to — Oh, I know he was a . . . killer, but if you'd only winged him. . . ."

MacDonald looked at the body. There was a bullet hole in the fleshy thigh.

Nick Noble said softly, "What did he say?"

"Like a palmetto," Mr. Matteson muttered absently. "Whatever that means."

"Not quite," MacDonald corrected. "He said, 'Like Palmieri.' "

Nick Noble murmured, "Tosca . . . ?" His blue eyes glazed over as he strolled away.

MacDonald said, "I'll call the boys. I'm sorry, Mr. Matteson. It's hell it had to end this way. But at least it's a clear case of self-defense."

"I didn't shoot him," Matteson insisted. "I mean, I didn't kill him. They can tell in the autopsy, can't they? Ballistics?"

"They can tell," said MacDonald.

Nick Noble wandered back with a small paper-bound book in his hand. "What's holding you, Mac?" he asked.

MacDonald moved toward the phone. "Of course."

Nick Noble shook his head. "Uh uh. What's holding up arrest?" He jerked his thumb at Matteson. "Murder."

It was the music room. There should have been an orchestral chord, *tutti, fff*, with a roll on the kettledrums. Instead there was silence while Mr. Matteson blinked. "Murder?" he said at last, and he was pretty old for his voice to be changing.

Nick Noble said, "You killed him. How know which bullet unless you

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fired it on purpose?"

Mr. Matteson laughed. "My dear drunken reasoner, the autopsy will establish beyond a doubt that the lethal bullet came from the Lieutenant's gun."

"Sure. You fired it. Switched 'em in the dark, back again when you stumbled. Wiped prints, I guess. Good at sleight-of-hand; remember how you switched records under my nose at Chula Negra?"

MacDonald had turned away from the phone. "Nick, are you sure what you're doing? Why should Matteson shoot to kill?"

"Inherits partner's estate."

"But he's a wealthy enough —"

"Not wealth. Partner was thinking of leaving record collection to University; collector like Matteson couldn't see treasures go out of hands."

Mr. Matteson coughed. "How true. I mean, I realise how fortunate it is that Milton died before making that ridiculous testamentary alteration. But granting my motive, my dear alcoholic intellect, how did I know that my secret burglar was my partner?"

"Easy. Put him up to it. He hated cops. O.K. You planned a hoax to make fools of us. We heard you on phone. '*Wait till you see their . . .' faces*, obviously. Even gave time: 10:50. Now 11:05. Unusual time because prompt 10:30 or 11:00 would look too prearranged. Thought quick for record — we saw tonight you know numbers without catalog."

MacDonald was moving casually toward Matteson. Almost imperceptibly the little man edged away. "And the attempted killing of Wilson?"

"Build-up. No intent to harm. You, of course. Tonight Harbrecht as burglar. Pistol with blanks to start us firing. You told him you'd hocus Mac's gun with blanks too. I saw pattern, tried to stop you — just too late."

Mr. Matteson considered the situation gravely. "Speaking as a lawyer," he announced, "I will admit that you have a fine presumptive case. Motive, means, and opportunity are complete. I might be willing — only as a lawyer, you understand — to grant your hypothesis. I should then ask: How in heaven's name can you prove a shred of it?" His mouth twisted with a faint grin of sly triumph.

MacDonald stepped toward him. The automatic was still in Mr. Matteson's hand, and it happened to be pointing at the Lieutenant.

"Dying words," said Nick Noble.

MacDonald stared at him. "That Palmieri gibberish? It meant something?"

Nick Noble held up the booklet in his hand. Its cover said *Tosca*. "Harbrecht was opera fan like you. Thought Palmieri stirred a memory and I checked it. It's in here: Heavy frames fake execution for hero, then frame within a frame — real instead of fake. Heavy gives henchman cue in front of heroine with one sentence — repeated, a fan'd know it — 'Fix it like Count Palmieri. Get me? *Like Palmieri.*' So what does 'Like Palmieri'

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nean when a dying opera fan says it? Means real bullets where you expected blanks."

It was the longest speech MacDonald had ever heard Nick Noble make. It also produced the promptest results. There was no longer any question whether Mr. Matteson's automatic was covering them.

"All right," the little man said tensely. "I still think I could talk a jury out of it; but the trial would finish me professionally. I can't afford it. So . . . get over there. With your hands up."

"Be my Valentine?" MacDonald suggested.

"Exactly, Lieutenant. A massacre. Remember, he was killed by your gun. Very well. You die by this one, which will be found with his fingerprints on it. We all shot it out. I survived with — a shoulder wound, probably. All highly regrettable." The little man's eyes gleamed as though he had suddenly found another hobby quite as fascinating as records.

MacDonald said nothing. His gaze followed every movement of Mr. Matteson's right hand.

"Go on," the little man snapped. "Over there. Get along."

Nick Noble moved obediently. As he moved, his hand caught a corner of the record file and jerked. The file leaned forward, hesitated, rocked back, then forward again. Already in his imagination MacDonald could hear the crash of the records.

Mr. Matteson hurled himself forward. He thrust his slight body in front of the file and propped it up with both hands like Samson at the gates of Gaza. There was the vigor of desperation in his weak muscles. Slowly the record file returned to normal.

With a sigh of relief, Mr. Matteson turned to face MacDonald's gun. Panic-stricken, he grabbed for his own, then saw Nick Noble picking it up from where he had dropped it to save his treasures.

It was some months later that Nick Noble spoke privately to Mamá Gonzales. "That Geyer record," he said. "*Cenicienta*. Remember little man that wanted it?"

"*Pos, ¿cómo no?*"

"Wonder if maybe he could borrow it. They're letting him have a phonograph up at San — where he is. Wrote to Mac he'd like to hear it. You'll get it back O.K.," he added. "He won't have time to wear it out."

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DO YOU KNOW YOUR A. B. C.?

The man who calls himself Anthony Berkeley is one of the most versatile craftsmen in the detective-story field. As "Anthony Berkeley," creator of Roger Sheringham, he writes the pure detective novel of which THE POISONED CHOCOLATES CASE *(1929),* THE SECOND SHOT *(1930), and* TRIAL AND ERROR *(1937) are brilliant examples of modern, natural, deductive story-telling. On the other hand, as "Francis Iles" he writes a tale of a different color — the "inside-out" study of murder usually seen through the eyes of the intended victim, with suspense and mounting horror the literary keynotes in a step-by-step dissection of the events leading up to the tragedy. In this technique Francis Iles is an acknowledged master — witness his classic* BEFORE THE FACT *(1932); true, he did not invent or even introduce this variation, but he did raise it to the peak of development and profoundly influenced every practitioner who followed him. Finally, as A. B. Cox (his real name, by the way) he is a graduate of professional journalism who within the confines of a mere 1000 words can satirize with devilish and double irony the mannerisms of Sherlock Holmes in the manner, believe it or not, of P. G. Wodehouse. See his delicious "Holmes and the Dasher," reprinted in your Editor's suppressed anthology,* THE MISADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES *(1944).*

So the American aficionado has come to expect three different styles from the pen of A. B. C. — unadulterated ratiocination, psychological suspense, and/or journalistic satire. But there is still another facet in the gemlike cutting of Anthony Berkeley's talent: he is also an expert exponent of the gentle art of writing the humorous crime story, the typically British species in which the meek inherit, not the earth, but all the troubles the earth is heir to. A perfect example of this subdivision of the genre is the story we now bring to you — "Mr. Simpson Goes to the Dogs," never before published in the United States.

Meet Mr. Horace Simpson on his first visit to a race track. Meet Mr. Simpson, bank cashier, in his first contact with real crime. Meet Mr. Simpson, all five feet seven of him, with his neatly waxed mustache and his rimless pince-nez, wearing the proverbial bowler, carrying the proverbial umbrella, and poking his proverbial nose into the affairs of other people. The Mr. Simpson of this world, for all his prissy well-meaningness, is ever the Man of Action; but what happened to Mr. Simpson at the dog track really shouldn't happen to a — but that's where you came in, remember?

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MR. SIMPSON GOES TO THE DOGS

by ANTHONY BERKELEY

If Mr. Simpson's wife had not been engaged that evening at her Social Institute, if young Wallace at the bank had not had the impertinence last week to taunt Mr. Simpson with condemning what he knew nothing about, if Mr. Simpson himself had not been feeling unaccountably restless, almost adventurous — well, if none of these things had happened, Mr. Simpson would never have paid that first visit of his to a greyhound racing track to learn for himself. But they did happen, and Mr. Simpson had plenty of cause to regret the fact.

Even then it was only by the merest chance that he saw what he did see. Had he been watching the race, he would have noticed nothing. But Mr. Simpson despised betting; the race seemed to him exactly like the other three which he had already seen; and his eyes had wandered to the little tendrils of fair curls below the black coalheaver hat (though Mr. Simpson did not know it was a coalheaver hat) on the nape of the slender neck in front of him.

Beyond an occasional cheap burglar, the ordinary citizen seldom comes into contact with real crime; even such a citizen as the chief cashier at an important suburban branch of the Southern Counties Bank, with every expectation of the next branch managership that fell vacant, as Mr. Horace Simpson was. So that when Mr. Simpson saw the hand of the girl in front of him dip unobtrusively into the pocket of the man next to her, to emerge clenched as if holding something, it was a second or two before Mr. Simpson realized exactly what the action meant. Then he remembered that the man had been standing there alone when he, Mr. Simpson, took up his own position, that the girl had only drifted along just as the race was beginning, and that no sign of recognition had passed between them. Moreover, from the movements of her elbows the girl now seemed to be transferring an object into her bag; and surreptitiously, for her head was still following the progress of the flying dogs.

"Tch! A pickpocket!" thought Mr. Simpson with distaste, and looked round for a policeman. Mr. Horace Simpson was not the man to be deterred from his duty by a misplaced sense of chivalry.

There was no policeman in sight, and before Mr. Simpson could decide what action to take, the race was over and the crowd on the move.

It did not occur to Mr. Simpson to take no action. He was accustomed to taking action. It was the opinion of the junior clerks at his bank that Mr. Simpson took a good deal too much action, and much of it unnecessarily; but Mr. Simpson cared less than nothing for the opinion of junior clerks.

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A neat plan presented itself to his mind. It was impossible, of course, to warn the man in the presence of the girl that he might have been robbed. Those who live in banks learn caution. Mr. Simpson waited therefore till the girl had turned away. Then, with the tail of his eye on her progress, he drew himself up to his full five feet seven inches, touched his neatly-waxed little mustache, adjusted his rimless pince-nez to a more formidable angle, swelled out his stocky chest (these were Mr. Simpson's invariable preludes to action), and tapped the victim smartly on the shoulder.

"Ah, Jones!" said Mr. Simpson, briskly. "I hardly expected to see you here."

The man jerked round and scowled. "My name is Edwards," he snapped, "not Jones."

"But you live in Acacia Grove, Surbiton?"

"I live in Munster Gardens, Bayswater."

"Then I beg your pardon." With a little bow Mr. Simpson turned and hurried after the miscreant, the name and address of the victim thus docketed for future reference.

The exchange had not taken more than a few seconds, but already the girl was a dozen yards away. Pushing his way round an exasperating loiterer, Mr. Simpson saw the black coalheaver hat and the neat black cloth coat with its collar of lighter fur just disappearing through an opening in an iron fence which extended from grand stand to rails ahead of him. Setting his bowler hat more firmly on his head, he hurried in pursuit. There was no definite plan in his mind. He simply knew that it was his duty as a citizen not to lose sight of the wrongdoer until he could hand his responsibility over to the proper person, a policeman.

Unacquainted with the ways of greyhound racing tracks, Mr. Simpson was unprepared to find the opening through which the girl had passed so easily barred against himself by a large person in uniform.

"Members only this way."

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Simpson with impatience. "But my business is important." He waited.

But the man did not stand aside. "I told you, members only this way."

"And I told you, my business is important. Kindly let me pass at once. I will notify your secretary, or whatever is the correct procedure." Already the girl was disappearing in the throng. Mr. Simpson was ill-advised enough to emphasize his remarks with a jab of his umbrella.

The guardian instantly adopted an attitude of high menace. "Ho, you would, would you? Clear off before I ——"

Mr. Simpson cleared. He was very angry, but he was prudent too.

Fuming, he strutted into a little archway that led underneath the stand he knew not whither. A lesser man might at this point have washed his hands of a matter which after all did not concern him personally. Not so Mr. Horace Simpson. His blood, only halfway up before, mounted. Duty

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was no longer merely duty. It was grim pleasure. For, of course, the girl was responsible for this humiliation.

Mr. Simpson emerged from the tunnel into a broad, covered passage, floored with concrete, which appeared to run along the back of the stands. He looked eagerly up and down it for a policeman.

On the opposite side of the passage was a large wire enclosure, round which horsey-looking men were leading greyhounds in a never-ending circle under pale electric lights. As Mr. Simpson glanced that way he clucked with gratification; for there, leaning against the wire, apparently intent on the procession inside, was someone quite unexpected; someone in a black coalheaver hat and a black cloth coat with a collar of lighter fur.

Desperately Mr. Simpson looked up and down the passage again, but not a policeman was in sight. Nor, for that matter, was anyone else. The grooms were leading their charges for the sole edification of the girl in the coalheaver hat.

Very well; Mr. Simpson would have to deal with the situation himself. He grasped his umbrella sternly and advanced.

"Young woman," frowned Mr. Simpson, "I must tell you that I was standing behind you during the last race, and — that is, I'm afraid I saw what you did."

The somewhat lame conclusion to Mr. Simpson's speech was due to the fact that the startled face which the girl turned upon him was not only a remarkably pretty one, but was covered, too, with tears. She had been crying against the wire there.

Tch! thought Mr. Simpson, embarrassed. Remorse. Well, very proper, no doubt. But no palliative. No; no palliative.

"Oh. . . ." whispered the girl, and shrank back.

Mr. Simpson was glad now that there had been no policeman. Guilt was in the girl's face, certainly; but innocence was, too. Unversed though he was in the ways of the criminal classes, Mr. Simpson knew that this was no hardened thief. She must have been desperate. Starving perhaps. Restitution must be made, of course, but after that Mr. Simpson would look into her case. It would not be unpleasant to help her.

His voice softened. "Was it the first time you've done anything like that?"

She nodded, then gulped. "Yes, it was. And I — did he — send you after me?"

"No, no." Mr. Simpson leaned back on his umbrella. He smiled almost paternally. "In fact, he doesn't even know I've come."

"He doesn't know?" To Mr. Simpson's astonishment the girl drew herself up and eyed him coldly. "Then why are you interfering?"

"My good girl, I told you. I was standing behind. I saw you." Mr. Simpson was nettled. "Perhaps you'd prefer the police to come into it?" he asked, sarcastically.

For a moment the girl stared at him blankly. Then the stricken look re-

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turned to her face, and she shrank back against the wire. "He wouldn't do anything — like that!"

"Indeed, I'm afraid he would." Mr. Simpson pressed his advantage. "Now, be a sensible girl. Come back with me, and we'll see if we can find him. I'm sure you're ready to do the right thing. And afterwards — well, we'll put things straight somehow. Come along."

For a moment it seemed as if the girl was going to yield to his persuasion. She had already taken a step or two forwards.

Then suddenly she turned. "No, I won't! I don't believe you. You're trying to frighten me. I — I think it's abominable of you to interfere. It's nothing to do with you."

"You do prefer the police, then?" Mr. Simpson asked, grimly.

"Oh, I'll take the chance of *that*." With a wild little laugh that was more sob than laugh, she darted back along the passage and up a wide flight of steps that opened on the right. Mr. Simpson darted in pursuit, much annoyed.

At the top of the steps a large man in uniform barred his way into a brilliantly-lighted vestibule, through which the black coalheaver hat was already disappearing.

"Members only this way."

"But it's urgent, my good man." Mr. Simpson shook with impatience and exasperation. "Look here, if half a crown's any good to you ——"

"Sorry, sir, afraid I can't. Members only this way."

"But I tell you I must. That girl who just came in ——"

The guardian's voice became stern and loud. "Now, then, you clear off. I know your sort. 'Op it, *quick!*"

Mr. Simpson hopped it. He was dancing mad, but there was no alternative.

As he walked back along the passage, he fumed. It was the last straw. The girl had had her chance. Duty was more duty than ever.

The crowd was beginning now to drift back to the rails and climb up the high stands for the next race. Mr. Simpson and his umbrella jostled their way back to where the robbery had occurred. If no policeman was available one could at least inform the man Edwards of one's suspicions. Mr. Simpson wished now that he had done so in the first place. The girl's prettiness no longer moved him. She had been trading on it, that was all. Very well.

As he pushed through the little tunnel Mr. Simpson's eye fell on a small blue cardboard disc lying on the ground. Tidily he picked it up. He remembered noticing now that some people had been wearing similar discs in their buttonholes. Some kind of a favor, no doubt. Absently Mr. Simpson fastened the disc to his own lapel, beside the neat metal badge of the South Suburban Cyclists' Club, of which he was the honorary secretary.

The man Edwards was not to be seen near his former station, nor was any policeman. Frowning, Mr. Simpson scanned the crowd. He was not baffled yet. The preparations for the

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next race interested him not a jot. Mr. Simpson was on sterner business bent.

His determination was rewarded. There, not a dozen yards from him, was the girl herself. By this time Mr. Simpson would have known that back anywhere. With incredible effrontery she was placing a bet with a bookmaker. While Mr. Simpson had been battling his way through the crowd, she must have passed at her leisure through the clubhouse and outdistanced him by yards, congratulating herself no doubt on the ease with which she had thrown him off the track. Very well.

Mr. Simpson grasped his umbrella and strode forward.

Yes, there were the tendrils of fair hair, above the fur collar.

But even now Mr. Simpson was disposed to be merciful. He would not humiliate the girl by a public denunciation. He would merely obtain possession of the stolen article, whatever it might be, and post it back the next day to the man Edwards. Who knew? Edwards might be an influential man. He had looked prosperous. Cast your bread upon the waters.

From behind, Mr. Simpson swiftly removed the bag that was tucked under the girl's arm, and said in her ear:

"*I'll* take charge of this for a few minutes. Come with me, please."

The girl was sensible. She made no protest. With the bag under his own arm Mr. Simpson stalked towards the tunnel.

But things were not to be so easy. Bag-snatching requires practice to become unobtrusive, and Mr. Simpson had none. He had not taken half a dozen steps before a loud masculine voice shouted behind him:

"Hi! Stop thief! Bag-snatcher, there! All right, miss, I'll get it back. Stop thief!"

Much annoyed, and disconcerted, too, Mr. Simpson crammed the bag into his overcoat pocket and glanced back. The girl would explain, of course, but this outcry was a nuisance.

A burly man in a weather-beaten trilby hat and a mackintosh was hurrying in Mr. Simpson's wake. Obviously it was he who had shouted. He had the girl by the elbow, too (infernal impertinence!), and was hurrying her along with him. She . . .

Mr. Simpson's mouth drooped open, and a look of horror appeared on his face. The girl's face was strange to him. *He had snatched the wrong bag!*

And then Mr. Simpson regrettably lost his head. Instead of walking back with dignity and explaining, he dived forward.

The man in the mackintosh, still dragging the wrong girl with him, dived, too. Mr. Simpson's dive became a nightmare flight, that of the couple behind him a hideous pursuit. Mr. Simpson's short legs pounded along. He was running now for far more than dear life: for reputation, wife, and future.

Already hands were stretched out upon him, though somehow he shook them off. The entrance to the tunnel was barred by curious bodies. Mr. Simpson swerved past it, and contin-

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ued along the straight. A fat man lay in wait in his path. Mr. Simpson drove the ferrule of his umbrella into his stomach and passed on.

To his dismay he realized that he had been making blindly for that same gap in the iron fence from which he had been turned away so ignominiously twenty minutes ago. But it was too late to swerve again. The prospect either way was equally hopeless, but Mr. Simpson ran on. He could not stop.

Luck was with him. Before he had come close enough to the guardian for that large man to realize that a hunt was up, the lights in the stands went out, to be replaced by the illumination on the track itself. Mr. Simpson's impetus carried him past the man in uniform almost before he realized. In point of fact, the man in uniform made no attempt to stop him. He seemed to glance merely at Mr. Simpson's lapel in the dim light, and then take no further interest. But he did stop the couple behind, effectively. Mr. Simpson could hear the man's protests as he fled, almost sobbing with relief, into the safety of the crowd inside and pretended, with bursting lungs, to be interested in nothing but the race that was being run.

By degrees Mr. Simpson recovered control of himself. He had been very fortunate; no blunder now must mar his luck. The bag was still burning a hole in his pocket. The first thing to do, obviously, was to get rid of it.

With a rapid sidling movement Mr. Simpson edged towards a large building which topped the members' stand behind him. That must be the clubhouse, and it must lead through to the vestibule and the flight of steps which opened into the covered passage in the rear; and that was the way he must escape after getting rid of the bag. It would be highly imprudent, of course, to show himself anywhere near the iron fence. The guardian there would have been warned that he was a —— Mr. Simpson shivered. Dear, dear, dear, this was all extremely distasteful.

As he sidled through the throng he edged the bag out of his pocket and let it drop gently to the ground.

A charming girl in a black coalheaver hat picked it up and gave it back to him. "You dropped this," she smiled.

"Oh — er — th-thank you," stammered Mr. Simpson.

For a second he had had a nasty shock when he saw the hat. But only for a second. For, using his eyes then for the first time, he realized that he was entirely surrounded by black coalheaver hats. Every other girl on the ground must be wearing one. And many, many of them were wearing, too, black cloth coats with collars of lighter fur. Bitterly and comprehensively Mr. Simpson cursed the lack of originality in feminine fashions which had led him to disaster.

The race over, the members' stand was emptying now. Mr. Simpson turned into it and pushed his way against the crowd till he reached the deserted half. There he sat down on a

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ench, worked the bag out of his ocket, took off his hat, and placed oth hat and bag on the floor under he bench. After a minute he retrieved he hat, got up, and made for the tail f the crowd.

"Hi!" cried a raucous voice four ows behind. "Hi, mister!"

Reluctantly Mr. Simpson looked ound.

"You've forgotten something," outed the man. "Under the seat. here! No, further back. Yes, that's . . . . You'd forgotten it."

"Thank you," said Mr. Simpson, ithout gratitude.

"He'd forgotten it," explained the an to the young woman beside him.

"Yes, I thought he'd forgotten it," greed the young woman.

They beamed at each other.

Scowling, Mr. Simpson crammed he bag back into his pocket and with-rew.

It was still burning a hole there as he limbed wearily up the last flight of eps into the clubhouse. The entrance d straight into a long bar. Mr. Simp-on was not sorry. Bars normally eant little to him, but the sight of ne now was welcome. He subsided hankfully onto a stool and asked for whisky and soda.

Crouched over his glass, he re-iewed the position. It was absurd to el dejected. Luck on the whole had een with him. As for the bag, it was stock joke that one can never get id of an unwanted article in a crowded lace. But after all, there is always omewhere to leave it without attract-ing notice. Mr. Simpson leaned across the bar to pose a question.

But the barman was busy with a newcomer at Mr. Simpson's elbow. "Whisky and soda, sir?" he was saying. "Yessir."

Mr. Simpson glanced round, annoyed. The next instant his head shot back again. But it was too late.

"Hul-*lo!*" said the man in the mackintosh.

Mr. Simpson hunched his head, tortoise-like, into his coat.

"Well, fancy running into you," said the man in the mackintosh. He smote Mr. Simpson jovially on the shoulder, then leaned forward and breathed into his ear. "Smart bit o' work, that of yours, ole man. Sorry I nearly upset the apple-cart."

Somewhat dazed, Mr. Simpson sat up. The man smiled at him in a friendly way. "Here, finish that up. The next's on me. Boy, another of the same for this gentleman."

Mechanically Mr. Simpson did as he was bid.

"Been on the job long?" asked the man in the mackintosh, in a cautious undertone.

Mr. Simpson shivered. "No, sir. I have not."

"Is that so? Neat bit o' work that was then, for an amachoor."

The whisky and soda had done Mr. Simpson good. He drew himself up with some dignity. "Kindly leave me alone, sir. I am not, as you appear to think, a criminal."

"No?" The man in the mackintosh guffawed coarsely. "Just a hobby, I

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suppose. Some collects stamps, and some snatches bags. Well, that's O.K. by me, chum."

Mr. Simpson drew his stool away. The man drew his after it. Mr. Simpson was more agitated than he would allow himself to show. This was a dreadful fix he was in. Dreadful. . . . Discovery would mean ruin. Sheer, blank ruin. A bank has no place for bag-snatchers, however laudable their motives. If he ever got out of this mess Mr. Simpson vowed that he would never, never concern himself again in other people's affairs.

"Still got the goods?" whispered the man in the mackintosh.

Mr. Simpson groaned aloud.

"What's up, cully?"

Mr. Simpson took a desperate decision. The man's tone had sounded unexpectedly sympathetic, and Mr. Simpson craved sympathy.

"I — I am in a serious predicament," he gulped. "If you could advise me, I should be grateful." Without more ado he plunged into his story.

The man listened critically. "Sounds a bit thin to me, old man," he opined, when Mr. Simpson had finished.

"I realize that," Mr. Simpson said, despondently. "Nevertheless I pledge my word it is the truth. And I was thinking that if you would — er — relieve me of the bag, and — and deliver it to the proper authorities, of course — and perhaps accept a small honorarium for your trouble, say a pound note — say two pounds — say five pounds — say all I could conveniently afford," blurted out Mr. Simpson in desperation, as the man continued to look at him fixedly.

The man removed his gaze, but showed no sign of having understood Mr. Simpson's suggestion. "Another girl wearing one of those coalheaving hats, eh?" he remarked, thoughtfully.

Mr. Simpson mechanically followed the new direction of his companion's eyes. The next instant he jumped off his stool with a cry of joy. "That's the one! That's the girl. She'll corroborate what I told you. She must! Kindly wait a moment." He hurried along the bar.

The girl was standing at the farther end in conversation with a young man. She was looking prettier than ever, but Mr. Simpson had no thought for that. He would have liked to shield her, before her companion, but that was no longer possible.

The girl saw him coming and, with a little cry, ran to meet him, both hands outstretched. "Oh, I *am* so glad," she bubbled, before Mr. Simpson could say a word. "I did take your advice, you see. Jack, this is the dear little man I told you about, who followed me and scolded me into making it up with you."

Mr. Simpson found his inert hand crushed in the young man's. "Sportsman, sir!" The young man clapped him heavily on the back. "Have a drink."

"He threatened all sorts of things, darling," giggled the girl. "He said men had killed themselves for love before now."

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"I — I didn't," feebly interposed Mr. Simpson.

"Oh, well, you said something about the police; so, of course, I thought of as-ovens at once. What did you mean, then?"

"It doesn't matter," said Mr. Simpson, and crept away.

He realized at last what a colossal fool he had made of himself. It had been just a lovers' quarrel. What he had seen was the girl dropping her ring into the man's pocket, not taking something out. And in his officiousness — no, that did not fit, either, because the young man was certainly not Edwards.

"Something's gone a bit wrong, hasn't it?" The voice of the man in the mackintosh had a new note of sternness.

"I, — I made a mistake," Mr. Simpson muttered.

"I'll say you did. Well, I'll have a word now with your two pals. You stop here."

Mr. Simpson stopped. The authority with which the man in the mackintosh was now speaking had given him a horrible suspicion that made his throat go dry and his knees wobble. Out of the corner of his eye he watched the trio. There was no laughter now. The man in the mackintosh was asking questions, and the other two were answering.

"A wh-whisky and soda, p-please," quavered Mr. Simpson to the barman.

But he was not destined to drink it. The man in the mackintosh came striding back with a gait that was almost military. He clapped a hand on Mr. Simpson's shoulder, and Mr. Simpson's flesh leapt and crawled under it as if the hand had been of red-hot iron.

"I am a police officer," he said, with no suggestion now of a Cockney twang. "Here's my warrant-card. I arrest you on a charge of stealing a lady's hand bag, and I warn you. . . ."

How they reached the police station Mr. Simpson never quite knew. Sometimes he thought they had walked, sometimes he seemed to have memories of a musty taxi-cab. All he did remember was how during the journey he wept, for perhaps the first time for thirty years, and how difficult it was to prevent the detective from seeing.

The actual police station, however, always remained very clearly in Mr. Simpson's memory. The bare charge room, the uninterested sergeant taking down the particulars which the detective dictated (Detective-Inspector Partridge, it appeared now, was the name of the man in the mackintosh), the constables looking so undressed without their helmets, even the almanac printed in red which hung, the only decoration, on the bare whitewashed walls.

"Not guilty," Mr. Simpson exclaimed wildly at intervals. "I have a perfect answer. This is all a mistake. It may have grave consequences. I insist on ——"

"You keep your trap shut, son," the sergeant would advise, not unkindly.

In his daze of despair it did not astonish Mr. Simpson to find himself

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confronted, a few minutes later, with the owner of the bag, nor to hear the detective-inspector say, in unctuous and complacent tones:

"There you are, miss. That's the man who got your bag. We haven't searched him yet. We want you as a witness that it was found on him." He nodded to the two helmetless constables.

One of them briskly extracted the bag from Mr. Simpson's coat pocket, and handed it to the sergeant.

Mr. Simpson, though he may not have known it, was gazing at his victim with a look of mute misery that would have melted a heart in a statue. To his incredulous joy the young woman, who had been looking at him stonily, answered his gaze with an understanding smile and said, in the coolest possible way:

"Oh, no. There must be some mistake. That isn't my bag."

"Then you don't charge him, miss?" asked the sergeant, as if it was all a matter of indifference to *him*.

"Certainly not. I've never seen this man before." And the admirable young woman flashed another understanding smile towards the now exuberant Mr. Simpson.

But his exuberance was short-lived.

"Never mind," interposed the detective-inspector, brusquely. "I'm a witness to the theft, and I identify both parties. Besides, this man's already confessed to me." He turned to Mr. Simpson and spoke with rough kindness. "Better come clean, old man. Tell the sergeant the story you told me, and admit that it was this lady's bag you took in error, and I'm not saying but what you mightn't get off scot free."

"Don't you believe him!" The young woman spoke urgently and, if it must be admitted, shrilly. "He's trying to trap you. Don't you say a word."

But Mr. Simpson was a broken man. He knew he had said too much already not to say more. And truth must prevail. The magistrate at least would believe him, if these men did not.

"It's true," he muttered. "I took it, by mistake. But ——"

"And you identify this woman as the woman from whom you took the bag?"

"Don't answer!" surprisingly shrieked the young woman. "You fool, it's a trap. Don't answer!"

But Mr. Simpson had already answered. "I do," he said.

The detective-inspector rubbed his hands and glanced at the sergeant. The sergeant rubbed his and glanced at the constables.

"And you identify her, too," pursued the inspector, "as the woman behind whom you stood during the third race?"

"No, I — I fear not. I never saw that woman's face."

The young woman sneered.

"Well, to substantiate your story can you offer any clue by which you could identify the woman behind whom you stood? Any distinctive feature in the dress, body marks peculiarities of gait or carriage?"

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"I don't think so," replied Mr. Simpson, humbly. "Wait though." A memory came back to him of fair curls on a slender neck. And on the left of the slender neck there had been — yes, a mole. "She had a mole on the left of the back of her neck."

To Mr. Simpson's amazement the owner of the bag suddenly began to scream at him. "You pie-faced idiot! You fat bit of dirt! I tried to do you a good turn, didn't I, you dam' squeaker? My gawd, it's a bit thick to ——"

The inspector nodded to the sergeant, the sergeant nodded to the constables. "Put her in No. 4," he said, laconically.

Amid shrieks and strange oaths the young woman made an ignominious exit. Neither the inspector nor the sergeant took the slightest notice of the bewildered Mr. Simpson.

"Now for it," muttered the former; and opening the bag, he inverted it over the sergeant's desk. A shower of small articles clattered down onto the wood.

The inspector pounced on a little package in a twist of brown paper, and undid it. The next moment two huge emeralds were winking greenly on his large palm.

"Ah!" breathed the inspector and the sergeant in unison.

Mr. Simpson looked on in bewilderment.

The inspector wheeled round on him. "You saw that, sir? You can witness to what we found in that bag?"

"Er — yes. You found those — are they really emeralds?"

"They are that, sir. Whoppers, too, eh?" The inspector suddenly seized Mr. Simpson's hand and pumped it vigorously. "And that's what she took out of Edwards' pocket, under your nose — though his name isn't Edwards. In fact, Mr. —— we still don't know your name, but we're very much in your debt."

"But — but what —— ?"

"It's like this," the inspector in the mackintosh explained. "Those earrings were stolen from a very important house last week. A *very* important house. We were right in the dark; hadn't got the foggiest notion who'd done the job. But we got the tip that they were going to be passed on at that meeting tonight. So I took some men and went. Not much hope, but I did.

"Well, who should I see there after a bit but Sally Reeves. Sally didn't know me, but I knew her. (That's Sally, by the way, in No. 4 now.) So I hung around. Actually she must have had the goods in her bag then, but I didn't know that, though I guessed she might. In fact, I was meditating doing a bit of quiet bag-snatching myself, on spec, though it might have been risky. Anyhow, when you grabbed it I jumped at the chance, and had her brought along here while I went after you. Of course, I knew your story was true as soon as I heard it, and ——"

"But you pretended to disbelieve me," said Mr. Simpson, hurt.

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The inspector winked. "I had to get you here, too, sir, and I thought you'd act the part a bit better if you didn't know too much. But that isn't all you did for us. Thanks to you, we can lay our hands on the man who did the job. No, his name isn't Edwards, but he does live in Munster Gardens, and your description of him clinches it. Funny what people will give away, isn't it? By the way, you'd better let us have your name and address now, sir, and then you can go."

"Ah!" said Mr. Simpson, cautiously. "But if you're preferring no charge against me . . . I really don't care you know, to be mixed up in ——"

"Charge?" said the inspector. "Certainly not, sir." A dreamy look came over his face. "But there's a pretty big reward out for information leading to the recovery of these stones, sir. From the help you've given us I wouldn't wonder if you came in for a nice slice of it, if not the lot."

"My name," said Mr. Simpson briskly, "is Simpson. Horace Simpson. I live at ——"

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they don't look very much like real rockets. Their noses are hemispheres or parabolas of revolution; a parabola of revolution happens to be a "constant pressure" shape for low-speed flight. The drag of these blunt-nosed shapes is 40-60% *less* than a slim cone or supersonic ogive. Bodies on model rockets are longer to give higher Reynolds Numbers and less drag, as well as greater fin moments.

Model rocket fins attempt to harness span-wise air flow for greater effectiveness and lower induced drag; fin airfoils have rounded leading edges and tapered trailing edges in an attempt to maintain laminar flow over them at high angles of attack. Surfaces on models are shiny and smooth, sometimes waxed, to provide a slick finish that will forestall turbulent boundary layer separation leading to increased drag.

Some models use boundary layer control devices such as fences to prevent flow around their bodies at an angle of attack. In fact, one young man designed a perfectly good finless model rocket utilizing flow fences around the tail to straighten out the flow in that region. Advanced modelers are also paying great attention to fin-body fillets to reduce interference drag between the body and the fins.

This is all great fun, of course. There may never be any practical commercial use for what model rocketeers are learning about low-speed ballistic flight. *But who cares?* The research we have all done has allowed altitude records to increase by nearly one hundred per cent. With one pound-second of total impulse, it is now possible to put a two-ounce model rocket over thirteen hundred feet in the air. Stability of models at launch has improved tremendously, and spot-landing contests are becoming interesting. We are using our hobby of model rocketry to learn things that nobody else has bothered to tackle.

Another example of the different shape of a subsonic rocket from that of a supersonic rocket. Although not as aesthetic in appearance, the left-hand model was designed to fly in the low subsonic regime, in contrast to the right-hand model which is patterned after supersonic rockets.

As I mentioned above, we still don't have all the answers to the problems we, as amateur scientsts, have set for ourselves. We do not even know if we are on the right track. Perhaps some aerodynamicist with an interest in low-speed flight could give us some tips, providing he will pardon my reference to aerodynamics are an arcane art.

I often wonder what other areas have been by-passed by professional endeavor because of lack of promising reward, technological sophistication, or interest. Low-speed aerodynamics happens to be only one of those areas. In our search for information, we are re-investigating the work done by the aeronautical pioneers—the Wrights, Langley, Lilienthal, Pilcher, Chanute, and others—in an at-

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